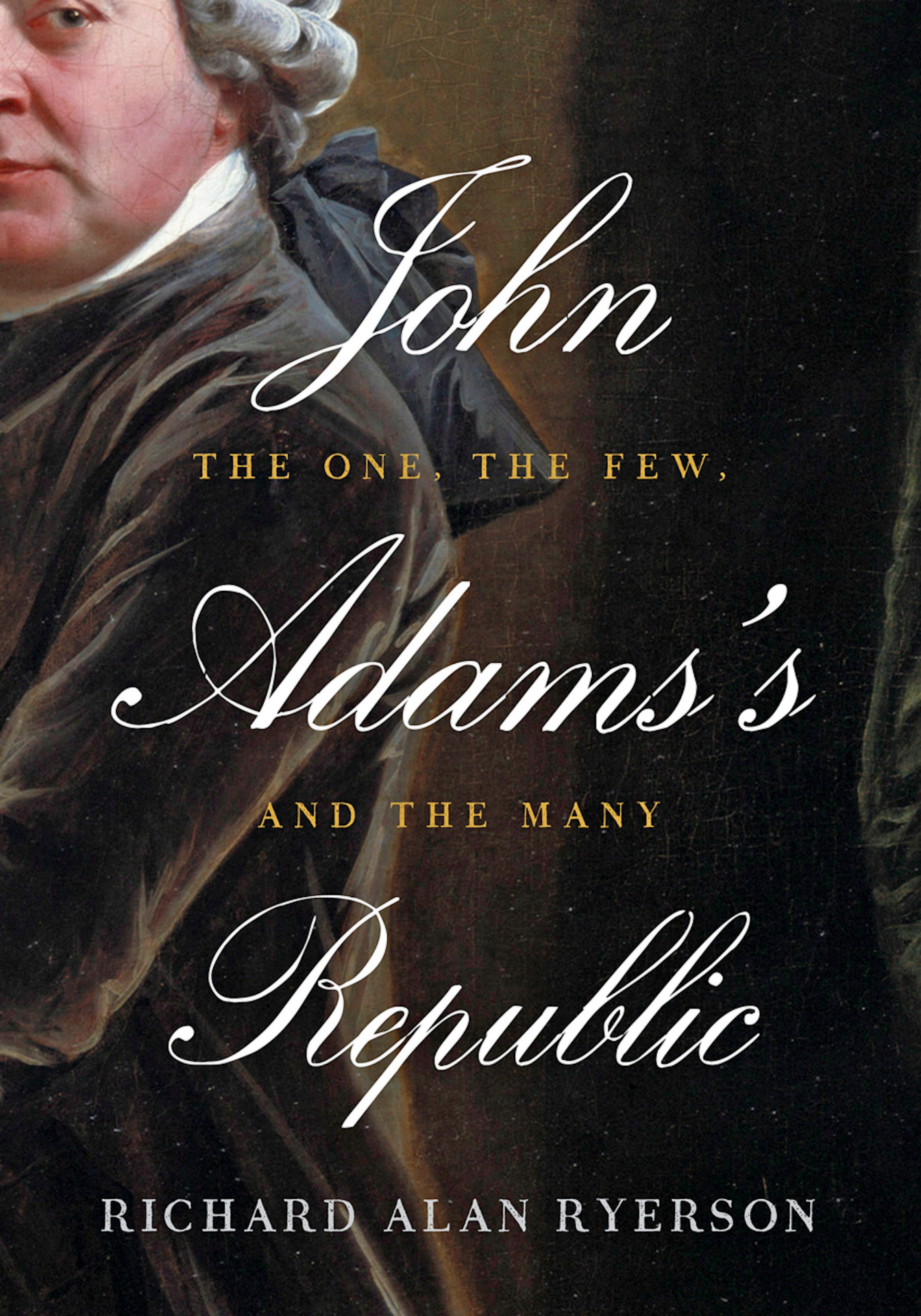

John Adams's Republic

THE ONE, THE FEW, AND THE MANY

RICHARD ALAN RYERSON

VISIT…

JOHN ADAMS'S REPUBLIC

John Adams's Republic

The One, the Few, and the Many

Richard Alan Ryerson

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To my wife, Marla
And my daughter, Anna
For their love and support

I have also the honor most perfectly to harmonize in your sentiments of the humanity and wisdom of promoting education in knowledge, virtue, and benevolence. But I think that these will confirm mankind in the opinion of the necessity of preserving and strengthening the dikes against the ocean, its tides and storms. Human appetites, passions, prejudices, and self-love will never be conquered by benevolence and knowledge alone.

To Samuel Adams, 18 October 1790

The affectation of being exempted from passions is inhuman. The grave pretention to such singularity is solemn hypocrisy. . . . government is intended to set bounds to passions which nature has not limited.

"Discourses on Davila," essay xiii, summer 1790

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PREFACE

Some twenty years ago, while editing the Adams Papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society, I became increasingly aware that, in both his political beliefs and his way of reasoning about government, John Adams stood apart from virtually all his prominent colleagues in the Revolutionary movement and the founding of the American republic that followed. Several scholars have taken note of this, including Edward Handler, John Howe, and Gordon Wood in the 1960s, Peter Shaw in the 1970s, and C. Bradley Thompson in the 1990s, and each has effectively characterized Adams's political convictions. But no one has, to my mind, explained how and why he came to hold his singular views. Although I made a few brief attempts at addressing the question through occasional papers and subsequent published essays, my ongoing editorial responsibilities prevented me from exploring it to my own satisfaction for nearly a decade (see "An Essay on Sources" at the end of this study). Over the past dozen years, however, I have finally enjoyed the greatest of all resources, that of time, as well as the support of several academic friends and institutions that such a venture demands.

The work that follows is an exploration in intellectual history centered on the political thought of one man, not an essay in political science based on the published work of one writer. Its larger thesis—that John Adams developed and expounded an extraordinarily expansive view of executive authority, and of the relationship of the executive to aristocratic and democratic forces, which in his opinion was entirely compatible with both fully elective republics and hereditary constitutional monarchies (which he also called republics)—lies well within the characteristic subject matter of political science. But the treatment of this thesis will extend beyond that discipline's traditional investigation of intellectual influence—in the present case, of the major writings of political philosophers and historians, from Plato and Aristotle to Machiavelli and Harrington, that powerfully informed so much of Adams's writings. As a historical inquiry, it will pay close attention to the context of John Adams's thought, both to the eighteenth-century British North American legal, political, and intellectual setting of his life and to that life as he lived it, as a public man—lawyer, congressman, diplomat, and federal executive—and as a private man.

My reasons for adopting this approach are several. Unlike most major writers in the history of Western political thought, John Adams was not exclusively or even primarily a political thinker but lived a long life full of legal and political activity at the highest level. Moreover, again unlike many political philosophers, Adams expressed his political thought over a period of some two decades in a

variety of brief, occasional pieces, just a few of which had considerable immediate impact, before turning, at age fifty, to his only broadly conceived political work, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*. And there is yet another reason for attending to both the historical and the biographical context of John Adams's work—there is so much of it. Unlike many early modern European authors, John Adams left a full and often intimate record of what he was thinking and doing, and even what he was feeling, as he proceeded from the composition of one essay or public document to another to develop his distinctive political and constitutional vision.

Finally, it is my belief that over the past several decades many American scholars have draped select members of our nation's founding political generation, notably Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and John Adams himself, in the same ahistorical costumes they are used to placing on the giants of Western political thought. A frank acknowledgment that these philosophic Americans were highly successful political leaders, while several of their European ancestors in political theory either led more private lives or saw their engagement in public life come to disappointing or even tragic ends, takes away nothing from the argument that Adams's *Thoughts on Government* or Hamilton's and Madison's *Federalist* essays—and both Adams's and Madison's constitution making—have had at least as great an impact on American political life as James Harrington's *Oceana*, John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, or Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* had in England and France. Moreover, the attempt to reify America's Revolutionary actors as timeless Western thinkers has too often been instrumental to a larger goal, to erect a mythic, pure American past dedicated, above all else, to "liberty." A past so narrowly conceived must render stern judgment upon America's messy present, in which both leaders and common citizens have the audacity to aspire to additional public goals (as did many of their eighteenth-century forebears).

I should add a simple caveat. This work is not a general study of John Adams's political thought in which each of his political and constitutional convictions receives full and equal treatment. The focus here is on those ideas that set him apart from other American political thinkers of his age. As the narrative moves into the middle and later periods of Adams's career, from American Independence to his retirement, the two leading themes will be his exalted vision of executive power and his increasingly dark view of the political character and role of aristocratic forces, as they related to the larger structure and purpose of republican government.

Short, stout John Adams had a large and fertile mind, and no one effort, by any one scholar, can presume to plumb its depths. If the work that follows answers some important questions about his political thought, it will meet my expectations. If it stimulates other questions, it will be yet more pleasing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish first to express my gratitude to the National Endowment for the Humanities for its support of my research at an early stage of this project, through fellowship FB-39549-03, taken in 2004. To three of my colleagues from Jack P. Greene's Early American History seminar at Johns Hopkins University, Jack Crowley, Peter Onuf, and Alan Tully, and to Professor Greene, who have all encouraged me in this undertaking for over a decade, I owe a great debt. That debt is still greater to Professor Onuf, who graciously gave my draft manuscript a careful reading before its final revision. And I gratefully acknowledge the helpful criticisms of my fellow documentary editor, Barbara B. Oberg, who gave that draft a thoughtful reading for Johns Hopkins University Press. In the early stages of writing this work, Professor Tully, as chair of the Department of History at the University of Texas, where I once taught, invited me to present my first chapter there. Members of the Boston Area Early American History Seminar, meeting at the Massachusetts Historical Society, gave my second chapter a thorough discussion, preceded by a vigorous critique by Professor Robert Gross. From Wilson Dolman and Burton Spivak, two good friends since our days at the University of Texas, and from my wife Marla Eby, I received good suggestions that improved this work's title. Finally, I wish to thank my editor at Johns Hopkins University Press, Robert J. Brugger, who early expressed his interest in this work and encouraged me to see it through, to editorial assistant Kathryn Marguy, who expertly guided the text through the preparations for editing, and to Brian MacDonald and Mary Lou Kenney, whose editing greatly improved the final text. Any errors of fact or infelicities of presentation that remain after the perceptive comments of these scholars and friends are my sole responsibility.

For their superb resources and unfailing help, I want to thank the staff of the Harvard College Library (Widener), and Harvard's rare book library (Houghton). The staff of special collections at the Boston Public Library, especially Susan L. Glover, keeper of Prints, Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Archives, and Beth Prindle, formerly project manager of the collections' John Adams Library, have been of indispensable assistance. I also want to express my thanks to the staff of Lexington's Cary Memorial Library for providing the congenial environment in which the greater part of this work was written.

For their help in getting John Adams right, I owe a considerable debt to the staff of the Massachusetts Historical Society and more particularly the members of the Adams Papers editorial project, especially my successor, Editor in Chief C. James Taylor; my former colleague Senior Editor Gregg L. Lint; former

associate editor Margaret A. Hogan; and assistant editors Sara Georgini and Amanda Mathews. And I want to express my gratitude for the encouragement and support of members of my extended family: Judy Ryerson, Keld Agnar, Barbara Racine, and Richard Racine. My daughter, Anna, has helped sustain my spirits by offering a steady stream of amusing comments and alternative titles for this work, but it is my wife, Marla, who has made the greatest contribution by believing in this endeavor from its inception and offering her encouragement and support of over a decade. Finally, the pioneering scholarship of Lyman Butterfield, the founding editor of the Adams Papers edition and the primary editor of the *Diary & Autobiography of John Adams*, is so integral to the creation of the present work that I gladly pay tribute to the memory of this giant of American historical editing.

JOHN ADAMS'S REPUBLIC

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INTRODUCTION

The Evolution of a Distinctive Republican Vision

> Let us now inquire, whether the new constitution of the United States is or is not a monarchical republic, like that of Great Britain. The monarchical and the aristocratical power in our constitution, it is true, are not hereditary; but this makes no difference in the nature of the power, in the nature of the balance, or in the name of the species of government.
>
> *To Roger Sherman, 18 July 1789*

Some four decades ago Gordon Wood, in *The Creation of the American Republic*, his classic exploration of the development of America's distinctive constitutional tradition during the American Revolution, memorably appraised "The Relevance and Irrelevance of John Adams." In that chapter, he portrayed Adams as committed from his earliest writings to all the essential forms of American constitutionalism—a bicameral legislature, with independent executive and judicial branches, all set in an effective system of checks and balances—his "relevance." But Wood saw Adams as parting ways with his countrymen in the 1780s over the fundamental relationship of constitutional forms to American society. Where Adams saw the major branches of any free government, whether in Europe or America, as representing distinct and timeless aspects of human societies, and therefore in some sense dividing the sovereignty of the whole society between them, his countrymen were coming to see every institution of government, and every officeholder, as an agent of an essentially undivided society, the whole people, who alone possessed and exercised all sovereignty. By the 1790s this development had rendered John Adams's constitutional thought "irrelevant" to the radically transformed American political tradition.[1]

The arresting title of Wood's chapter has never sat well with many admirers of John Adams, including the present writer. But his characterization of the long arc of Adams's constitutional thought from the 1760s until his death, and

particularly of its relationship to America's rapidly evolving constitutional thought in the Revolutionary era, remains generally sound. Moreover, it provides a persuasive explanation for at least some part of the decline in John Adams's political reputation in the 1790s, particularly among his peers at the apex of American public life. What neither Wood nor any other scholar has yet sought to explore in depth, however, is the process by which John Adams moved to the very center of American constitutional thought, from the Stamp Act crisis to the First Continental Congress; became the dominant voice at that center from the opening of the Second Continental Congress to his drafting of America's finest and most influential state constitution in 1779; and soon thereafter moved away from that center to stand, by the 1790s, on the margin of America's constitutional tradition, while paradoxically holding the highest elective offices in the new federal republic. The present study is an attempt to understand more fully how and why Adams's ideas developed as they did, and why they eventually diverged so sharply from those of his countrymen.

John Adams's move to the center of American political life encompassed three difficult journeys. The first was professional, his progression from a raw young country lawyer to the most learned and persuasive attorney in his province. This journey was essential to the others because Adams lacked both the personal temperament needed to build a popular political career and the social connections required to move effortlessly into provincial office. His legal talents, however, were so highly valued by 1770 that they earned him his only electoral victory outside his native town, and in 1774 they persuaded the Massachusetts legislature to name him to its delegation to the First Continental Congress.

Adams's second journey was more personal and private, at times even secretive. He had to somehow bring into balance two discordant aspects of his nature, his highly moral and deeply elitist feelings about public virtue, policy, and service and his keen desire for fame. Had British North America not become embroiled in its deadly quarrel with Great Britain in the 1760s and 1770s, John Adams might well have resolved these elements in his personality by using his legal reputation to secure legislative election to Massachusetts's provincial council or gubernatorial appointment to the province's Superior Court. Neither elevation would have required courting the public, and unless he were bestowed the royal favor of a governorship, he could go no higher in public life in his native land. The imperial crisis, however, demanded that he make more difficult choices, not merely to risk his family, his fortune, and possibly his life by challenging the Crown, but to become a more prominent public figure than even his keen desire for provincial fame required.

Adams's third journey, the proper subject of this study, was an intellectual one. Convinced in the 1760s that the British constitution was mankind's finest political creation, and equally convinced by the early 1770s that the British constitution, as misunderstood in a corrupt Britain, could no longer secure the

rights of British North Americans, he had somehow to redeploy the essential elements of that constitution, with minimal alterations from its generic colonial form, to create a more durable foundation for American liberty. Adams subscribed to the widespread colonial belief that British Americans were the British Empire's most stalwart supporters of the "true British constitution," which too many in Britain itself had abandoned as their nation grew rich and powerful, and in 1773 he sought to fortify the colonies' position by claiming for them the rights of autonomous dominions within that burgeoning empire. But by 1775, in his *Letters of Novanglus*, he began reaching for something both broader and deeper, a political tradition that was less rooted in a single empire and in the legal and political heritage of a single linguistic culture. He found his answer in the literature and values of Europe's republican tradition, which he made the cornerstone of his political philosophy for the remainder of his long life.

As soon as Adams embraced republicanism, he became its leading American advocate: in Congress in 1775, in his *Thoughts on Government* in 1776, and in the finest achievement of his constitutional thought, his 1779 draft of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780. At the outset of this innovative political period, his congressional colleagues readily acknowledged Adams as America's foremost constitutional authority, and *Thoughts on Government* became the most succinct and persuasive statement of the new nation's political orthodoxy. In 1776, John Adams did not merely appear to be at the center of America's new political culture, he appeared to be that center.

1. Toward a New Republican Vision

Well before he framed a new constitution for Massachusetts, however, the character of John Adams's political thought began to change in ways that parted company with the simultaneously changing thought of his Revolutionary colleagues. The first signs of daylight between Adams and his countrymen were either too subtle or well hidden from public view to attract much notice: the singular character of his legal and political reading in the 1760s and 1770s, and the occasional expression of new political fears in his private correspondence shortly after Independence. Next, a few clauses in his 1779 draft of Massachusetts's new constitution were contested, and in some cases rejected, by his colleagues without any apparent appreciation of the magnitude of their departure from America's republican orthodoxy. Finally, from a broader perspective on political life in America, largely acquired by residing and working in Europe from 1778 to the late 1780s, Adams's fears that many of his countrymen fundamentally misunderstood the true nature of republicanism grew more pronounced, but for nearly a decade he largely confined these misgivings to his own private musings.

Then in January 1787 from his study at the American legation on London's Grosvenor Square, utterly without warning, John Adams declared his new

political faith in the most public manner by publishing what would become the first volume of his magnum opus, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*. This work quickly reached America, while in London Adams soon added two more volumes. A few of his countrymen immediately sensed Adams's dissent from the nation's new republican orthodoxy. Most evident were his insistence that aristocracy was an unavoidable element in all governments, but especially in republics; that to control aristocracy every republic must have a powerful executive with quasi-monarchical powers; and that at least one hereditary monarchy, that of Great Britain, was in fact a republic. A handful of early readers of the *Defence* appreciated how novel and unsettling its argument was in the context of the rapidly evolving ideology of the Revolution, and one perceptive critic promptly published an effective rejoinder to it. But for a few years the *Defence* appeared to have relatively little impact on Adams's political reputation.[2]

This happy neglect gradually came to an end as Adams joined the new federal government as America's first vice president in April 1789, promptly became involved in controversy in the new Senate over which he presided, exchanged candid letters with other American leaders with whom he differed on the essence of republican faith, and then began serially publishing his "Discourses on Davila" (1790–91), which restated his distinctive republican beliefs. The sentiments in these essays finally brought Adams into direct contention with Thomas Jefferson and the emerging Democratic-Republican opposition to America's Federalists. For the remainder of his service in federal office—indeed, for the remainder of his life—many of John Adams's countrymen saw his newly expressed political convictions as a lamentable departure from America's political mainstream.

Adams's long retirement (1801–26) became, in greater part than he wished, an extended defense of his political views since Independence, views that he always regarded as impeccably republican. He began his last quarter century quietly and in a depressed state of mind following his bitter loss of the presidency to his former—and future—friend Thomas Jefferson, who had been ably assisted by a few other old friends whose support Adams had assumed he would have. His first substantial attempt at literary composition in the new century was his vivid but incomplete autobiography (1802–7), but this work was intended only for his family, and it remained private until his grandson published it with Adams's other works in the 1850s. Even as he composed this personal memoir, however, two severe criticisms leveled against both his political beliefs and his performance of his official duties finally persuaded him to mount a public defense of his career and his character. The first was Alexander Hamilton's impassioned election pamphlet, *A Letter Concerning the Public Conduct and Character of John Adams* (1800), a savage attack over which Adams brooded for more than a decade. But Hamilton, at least, had never been on close terms with him. A greater shock was the accusation of his longtime and once intimate friend Mercy

Otis Warren, in *The Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* (1805), that Adams, corrupted by the luxury of Europe's imperial courts in the 1780s, had abandoned his republican principles.

Adams's principal response to these attacks was a long series of letters to the *Boston Patriot* (1809–12). Soon published in volume form, these letters devoted considerable energy to defending his diplomatic career. Beginning even before his polemical endeavors, however, he took advantage of fresh opportunities to present and defend the essence of his republican beliefs, with only an occasional reference to his performance in office. Adams's first such venue was his rich correspondence with his old friend Dr. Benjamin Rush, which he resumed in 1805, and continued until Rush's death in 1813. The next occasion for expounding his convictions was a set of amendments to the Constitution proposed by the Federalist senator James Hillhouse in 1808, to which he wrote and attempted to publish a spirited critique. Then in 1812, at Rush's urging, Adams initiated his fullest exchange of ideas on many subjects with Thomas Jefferson, which concluded only with the correspondents' simultaneous deaths in 1826. To these private expressions, the bulk of which would remain unpublished for several decades, he added one last extended testimony of his unique republican faith, a series of private letters addressed to John Taylor of Caroline, as a reply to Taylor's *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the United States* (1814), which opened with an extended critique of Adams's *Defence of the Constitutions*.

The essential objective of the work that follows is to understand the origins and development of John Adams's intellectual journey from a prominent provincial spokesman for colonial rights within a constitutional, monarchical empire (chapters 1–3), to the leading theorist of American republicanism at Independence (chapters 4–5), and, finally, to an intellectually innovative, yet increasingly isolated, advocate of the organically based, predemocratic republic that he saw at the heart of the Western political tradition (chapters 6–10), and which he believed was the only secure fortress of free government in human history.

2. Adams Confronts the Democratization of American Republicanism

The political context for each step in John Adams's long intellectual journey, first to the center of American political orthodoxy and then away from that center, was the steady and pervasive democratization of America's rapidly developing republican ideology, from the sudden rise of popular opposition to British authority in the early 1770s to the framing and defense of the United States Constitution in 1787–88 and the final triumph of strong state executives and bicameral legislatures in 1790. This larger process comprised three vital transformations of the royal and proprietary governments that had prevailed in most of British America for nearly a century before the Revolution. The first, beginning in Massachusetts in the fall of 1772 and spreading to all the rebelling colonies in

1775 and 1776, was the bending of the executive power—vested in provincial governors and in their successors in the newly independent states—to the popular will. The second, beginning in 1776, was the expansion of the electorate, coupled in several states with sudden alterations in the distribution of legislative representatives. The third transformation, beginning in the early 1780s, was a reconception of the purpose and character of upper legislative chambers.[3]

The first popular demand in America for a radical change in the ultimate loyalty of the provincial executive—from the interest of the British Crown to the safety and happiness of the colonial population—emerged quite suddenly in the fall of 1772 and winter of 1773, as an immediate response to Boston's call on Massachusetts towns to contest Britain's decision to increase its control over the province by paying executive and judicial salaries. This protest movement grew rapidly and soon undermined the authority of the province's civilian royal governor, Thomas Hutchinson. General Thomas Gage, who succeeded Hutchinson as governor in May 1774, never recovered this lost power. The other British American provinces saw a more modest reduction in executive authority in the early 1770s, until armed conflict broke out in April 1775, but in the following year every rebelling province that had a royal or proprietary governor drove him from office, and several called on the Continental Congress for advice on how to govern without governors. Congress responded cautiously until May 1776, when it exhorted every province to create vigorous new governments. By July 1776, nearly every newly independent state either had altered its constitution to reduce executive power or was working on plans to do so.[4]

America's rage against executive power peaked in 1776, and soon thereafter several states began the process of creating thoroughly republican executives, responsible solely to the whole people as embodied in the full—and now generally expanding—electorate. But it took more than a decade to complete this process, with important landmarks in the new constitutions of New York (1777), Massachusetts (1780), New Hampshire (1784), and Pennsylvania (1790). John Adams was intimately involved in the early years of this struggle over executive power, from its inception in May 1775 until his second departure for Europe in November 1779, immediately following his drafting of Massachusetts's new constitution. Thereafter, he continued to work for a strong executive, but now quietly in his study, until he published *A Defence of the Constitutions of the United States* in 1787–88.

The second democratic transformation of American republicanism occurred primarily at the local level. It centered on expanding the electorate qualified to vote for representatives; enlarging assemblies to give cities, large towns, and frontier rural areas a stronger voice in legislation; and creating many new local offices open to a wider field of candidates. Much of this expansion was a direct result of America's sudden, massive political mobilization against British authority, first expressed in the local committee movement in 1774 and then in

rapidly expanding militias in 1775 and 1776. The political effect of this mobilization was quite uneven from one province to another. Provinces that had long enjoyed vigorous local government vested in a myriad of counties and towns, that elected relatively large legislative assemblies, and that had well-developed militias, notably Virginia, Connecticut, and especially Massachusetts, saw the least immediate change. But in a few provinces, most notably New York and Pennsylvania, that were divided into just a few large counties, elected small legislatures, and lacked strong militias, the Revolution brought a wrenching transformation and the most rapid expansion of the electorate. This dynamic process would eventually help shape the political character of every new state and would continue well into the nineteenth century.[5]

The third democratic transformation affected the upper legislative house in each state. In most provinces in British North America before Independence, this branch of government had been the least developed and the weakest. Usually quite small, and nearly always appointed by royal and proprietary governors who were in turn appointed in England, these governor's councils rarely commanded much loyalty from the general populace. With Independence, the assemblies in many new states seized the power to elect their councils. This made the upper chambers somewhat more popular, but most remained subsidiary and thoroughly elitist institutions. Several states, however, expanded their upper houses, provided for their popular election, and renamed them "senates." One of the most important of these provisions was John Adams's creation of a relatively large, popularly elected, and quite powerful senate in the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780.

Americans were slower to articulate a compelling purpose for their reformed upper legislative houses within the context of their new republican creed. Not until 1782, in Maryland, did local political theorists engage in a full and open debate on the proper role of their Senate, but when they did, they entertained the idea of a new, more republican role for an old, privileged institution. Defenders of the Maryland Senate asserted that the upper house need not be a repository of aristocratic privilege but could function as a distinct branch of the people's government with its own republican role to play. Truly republican senators, they argued, would not advance the narrow interests of an elevated social class. Instead, by virtue of their chamber's smaller size and its base in larger electoral districts, they would afford a different perspective from that of the representatives in the lower house. A senate could, in this manner, serve the people as effectively as an assembly by rendering an independent judgment and allowing a fuller, more effective consideration of major issues.[6]

The growing power and independence of America's provincial and new state governments were pleasing to John Adams, but the rapid democratization of American republicanism after Independence was not. From his authorship of the *Letters of Novanglus* in 1775 until his death, he was always an ardent republican

but never a democratic republican, a descriptive compound that his political opponents would quite appropriately claim as their label in the 1790s. But Adams's response to the three democratizing measures of American republicanism, centering on the executive, the electorate, and the upper legislative chambers, was neither uniformly hostile nor always readily understandable.

From the beginning of America's constitution making in 1775, John Adams favored the popular election of any province or state's chief executive, and in his own draft constitution for Massachusetts in 1779, he created a powerful governor chosen annually by all the voters. Nor did he object to reforms that distributed legislative seats in a manner that fairly represented each state's entire populace; in the 1780s he would argue that Britain should reform its House of Commons in this manner. But he was firmly opposed to broadening the electoral franchise beyond property-holding adult males. He was also opposed to, and indeed quite uncomprehending of, the new republican conception of legislative upper houses in the 1780s. The idea of a senate as an explicitly aristocratic body continued to hold a special significance in Adams's vision of republicanism long after most of his countrymen had rejected it as both archaic and offensive.

How John Adams came to these convictions is the subject of the chapters that follow. But one can begin to make sense of his distinctive republicanism, and see how it differed by the 1780s from that of many of his countrymen, by first relating it to economic and social class, to the various inequalities found in American and other societies, and then by positing a distinction between John Adams's larger sense of government's proper purpose and that held by at least some of his fellow Americans.

One of the most enduring convictions about John Adams, among historians fully as much as the general American public, is that he strongly approved of aristocracy and believed that a hierarchical class structure was both desirable and essential in the proper functioning of America's new republics. Like several other images of Adams—his Puritanism, his irascibility, his high regard for monarchy, and his doubts about the political wisdom of the people—this image is a fundamental distortion of what he actually believed. Adams did see the division of every community and every nation into unequal socioeconomic classes as both unavoidable and eternal, but his feelings toward aristocracy itself were deeply ambivalent. It was, he came to believe, a necessary evil that, in a republic, could and must be circumscribed and tamed to become a public benefit. Moreover, the aristocracy that Adams both feared and valued was not some artificial construction of noble titles and privileges that his critics mistakenly believed he admired, but which, in reality, he, like his critics, believed a republic could and should sweep away. Adams's aristocracy was, instead, the inevitable outgrowth of that naturally uneven distribution of talents and ambitions among men, which no government, whether tyrannical or free, could ever alter or eliminate.

This natural aristocracy was just as important for John Adams as it was for Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. He, like they, hoped that through education America's new republican culture would encourage, develop, and recruit its natural aristocracy of talent, in whatever existing social classes its members might originally be found, for the public good. But in one crucial respect he differed from his Democratic-Republican colleagues. They did not imagine that new aristocratic social classes might emerge from the ranks of this natural aristocracy to threaten the stability of the republic. In his celebrated *Federalist* No. 10, James Madison argued that whenever America's wealthier and more successful citizens, of whatever social origin, formed into rival factions to achieve their goals, a dynamic balance of these factions, factions that in the vast new nation being reorganized under the federal Constitution must vary considerably across different states and regions, would maintain stability. This balance of opposing factions was necessary, Madison declared, because "[t]he diversity in the faculties of men from which the rights of property originate, is not less an insuperable obstacle [than the natural diversity of man's opinions] to an uniformity of interests. The protection of these faculties is the first object of government. From the protection of different and unequal faculties of acquiring property, the possession of different degrees and kinds of property results: And from the influence of these on the sentiments and views of the respective proprietors, ensues a division of the society into different interests and parties."[7]

John Adams had no quarrel with Madison's Lockean view of the origins of social inequality, but he held a very different conviction about the proper end of government. He would come to believe, both from his personal experience and from his study of history, that the principal threat to any republican government was its aristocracy—its most talented and ambitious members—whether that aristocracy was natural or traditional. The immediate task of a free government, therefore, must be to control its aristocrats, both to prevent their forming competing factions that could disrupt the good order of the republic and to ensure that, working more cooperatively, they would not exploit the general population. The proper goal of a free government was not to protect its talented minority against its majority—Adams was confident that talented minorities would always find ways to defend themselves against less talented majorities—but to defend the majority, the people, against the more talented aristocracy. Nor could Adams, who was designing and defending constitutions for republics that were, in nearly every case, much smaller and economically more homogeneous than the vast federal entity of 1787, rely primarily on a balance of competing factions of differing character to control political discord. To protect both the whole republic and its vulnerable majority, Adams sought to reshape the three essential orders of republican government: the executive, the aristocracy, and the people.

3. The Terminology of Adams's Political Triad

Before considering how John Adams structured his republican edifice, however, I should say a few words about what the three essential components of his vision of a republic meant to him, and indeed how he defined republican government as a whole. In the work that follows, I have not sought to measure Adams's usage of these or any other political terms by twenty-first-century definitions of either contemporary or historical republicanism. I will from time to time compare Adams's republican views with those of selected European political writers whom he studied and quoted, and on occasion I will briefly contrast his views with those of selected American political contemporaries.

The first thing to understand about Adams's political thought is that his three ingredients of republican government—executive, aristocracy, and the people—did not merely replicate the traditional political triad that was taught "in the schools," as he expressed it in the 1760s, and that he would later study in detail in the writings of James Harrington and Niccolò Machiavelli.[8] These three elements were, he believed, common not only to all free governments, that is to say, to all republics, but to every government since individual, autonomous human beings first subjected themselves to the authority of the community in the prehistoric past. Although Adams apparently accepted as valid, or at least as plausible, the general account of the initial creation of governments posited by the contract theorists—particularly in the form presented by John Locke—he did not regard the essential triad of government as a matter of voluntary choice. The executive, aristocracy, and the people were innate functional components of the power that human beings exercised over one another and expressed essential realities of human interaction that no government, either free or unfree, could escape. The principal distinction between free governments—republics—and unfree governments, whether tyrannical monarchies, oligarchic aristocracies, or anarchic democracies, was the structure of laws by which the former ensured that each of its three essential elements performed only those roles most appropriate to it and did not prevent the effective functioning of its two partners. Drawing on Aristotle, by way of James Harrington, Adams encapsulated this distinction by declaring that a republic was "a government of laws, and not of men."[9]

Considered in this light, it is clear that John Adams's three elements of government did not exist to represent particular socioeconomic or cultural classes. Rather, they embodied vital needs and aspects of the whole society, and when they were operating effectively, each carried out just the political functions that were appropriate to its nature, and no other. This lies at the heart of the distinction between Adams's political vision and that of his more democratic republican critics, both in America and in France. By the late 1780s and early 1790s, his American adversaries saw the members of both upper and lower legislative

houses as representing the whole people (a term I shall treat shortly), while his French critics saw no need for an upper house at all. Executives, both governors and the new federal president, were not yet viewed in America as uniquely representing the whole people, as they would come to be seen as doing in the Jacksonian era, but they did serve the whole people. Senators were no longer seen, in American republican theory, as representing any particular social class; they shared largely the same constituents as the members of lower legislative houses. And the American people, the only source of sovereign power in their new republics, determined not only how representatives, senators, governors, and presidents would be chosen and what particular powers they would have; they had the unquestioned right to determine whether there would continue to be representatives, senators, and executive officers.

Adams, however, saw all of this in a quite different light. His republican executives did, of course, serve the whole people, but that is not why they existed. Every government, of whatever character, simply had to have a chief executive, regardless of whether its particular executive was good or bad, legitimate or illegitimate, popular and respected or unpopular and hated. Only the most anarchic democracies ever escaped this fate, and then only for a short while, until some tyranny or oligarchy brought a cruel end to their disorder. But even in republican governments, the executive's first obligation was to embody the executive principle. Moreover, the executive was properly singular, not plural, as he—and in Adams's day the executive was nearly always a he—embodied the One, in the traditional republican triad of the One, the Few, and the Many. This may appear not merely offensive but genuinely puzzling to contemporary readers who have been raised in a world divided between autocracies and democracies. They naturally expect that a chief executive will either represent all of his or her people, if he or she is good, or represent one particular region, ethnic group, economic interest, or social class, if he or she is bad. But Adams, following the teachings of Harrington, Machiavelli, and the ancient Greek historians and philosophers, regarded the One, the Few, and the Many as the primeval, immutable, and inescapable elements of public life.[10]

John Adams's view of aristocracy, too, was exceptional in America. His aristocrats, the Few, were not so thoroughly divorced from any one social class as his executive, but Adams did not envision them as representing a traditional upper class marked by titles and honors. Indeed, they did not *represent* any social class whatever. The Few were their own exceptional economic, social, and political class. Their members did not properly speak for all wealthy or talented men; they were themselves overwhelmingly wealthy, talented, and ambitious, and they spoke for themselves. John Adams's aristocracy was the unromantic flip side of Thomas Jefferson's natural aristocracy, a class not of exceptional republican virtue, but of exceptional economic and political ambition. The two most prominent capacities of the Few were the danger of oligarchy that they

posed to any republic if they were not properly controlled, and the benefits that their exceptional talents afforded any republic that could control them.

Finally, of course, there were the people. Like most of his contemporaries—and most of our contemporaries—Adams would employ the term "the people" in different ways on different occasions. But his use of the phrase in both his formal political discourse and his more self-conscious informal discourse, in his correspondence, was quite consistent over several decades. And here Adams again saw matters in a different light from that of many of his countrymen. Once America had come to embrace the people as the ultimate source of sovereign power, its republican leaders moved, regardless of how elevated a position they personally occupied on the social scale, to identify the entire legally constituted constituent power—which at its most expansive included all free adult males—as the people. While this broader definition of the constituent power prevailed in regular political elections in only a few states in 1776, notably in Pennsylvania, it would become the norm throughout America in the early nineteenth century. It is this larger entity that I will designate, from time to time as occasion requires, as "the whole people," in distinction to a more restricted sense of "the people" that John Adams would continue to employ in most contexts long after the Revolution.

For John Adams, the people were the Many—but never the whole—of the republic, before, during, and after Independence. They had their own political institutions, the lower legislative houses, in every state, as well as the federal House of Representatives, and they dominated the juries, just as the aristocrats had their upper legislative houses and the federal Senate, and usually held most judicial offices. What is crucial to understanding John Adams's people is that he trimmed off the operational core of this entity at both ends. He believed that poor adult males, like women and children, lacked the independence to become regular voters. They often did, however, qualify—unlike women and children—to cast a vote in the ratification of a state constitution, which gave them some share in the constituent power. They were a part of the people in a larger social sense but were not a fully qualified part in a political sense. At the other end of the sociopolitical scale, because the people were the Many, Adams favored segregating the Few from their ranks. He considered any society's aristocracy as separate and distinct from the people, and he insisted that aristocrats be encouraged to remain distinct, in an upper legislative chamber that was, in effect, reserved for them, to keep them from dominating the people's lower legislative chamber and thereby corrupting the people's voice, which would fatally unbalance the republic.

4. The One, the Few, and the Many

Each of the three essential elements of John Adams's republican thought—the executive, the aristocracy, and the people; the One, the Few, and the Many—lay at the heart of a distinct aspect of his republican vision. His executive,

although only one-third of his ideal republican legislature, was the balance point of his republican architecture. His aristocracy, the second third of his legislative structure, was the distinguishing feature of his republican social order. And his people—the Many, but not the whole—were not merely the final third of his legislative edifice, through their elected representatives; they were the principal intended beneficiaries of his republic, and of all republics. Each of these convictions differed in important ways from those of his republican contemporaries in America, differences we can best explore as he developed them, at selected points in the following chapters, and in the conclusion to this study.

Adams's commitment to robust *executive authority* is evident in nearly all his writings much earlier than his interest in aristocracy, and he expressed it more frequently and explicitly at nearly every stage of his life than he did his deep concern for the safety and welfare of the people. This early and persistent visibility does not in itself make executive power more important in Adams's thought than either aristocracy or the people; all three were fundamental aspects of his republican creed. But it does in part explain why several of his political opponents came to think of Adams as a monarchist in the 1790s, at a time when few had yet taken notice of his remarks on either aristocracy or the people. Adams's first public critics, a few senators and congressmen in 1789, and Thomas Jefferson in 1791, directed their dismay at his expressions of high regard for executive power because, beginning with the first volume of his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*, published in 1787, he had focused so much of his energy to making the case for a strong executive.

Adams's elevated concept of executive power had another aspect that neither his contemporaries nor many historians have appreciated. His views on the executive were remarkably consistent over the entire course of his life. His commitment to strong prerogative powers for America's new state governors faltered only once, during America's final passionate rejection of British rule in 1775 and 1776, and this departure from his core convictions soon ended. The overall arc of Adams's commitment to executive authority was first to defend it against all attacks through the mid-1770s, and thereafter, from 1779 into the 1790s, to make repeated appeals for its augmentation. It has been argued that Adams's political thought changed fundamentally in the 1780s as a direct result of his exposure to imperial authority and aristocratic splendor during his diplomatic service at the courts of France and Great Britain.[11] With respect to his feelings about aristocracy, this argument must be seriously qualified. With respect to executive power, however, it has no validity whatsoever. What John Adams believed about the executive immediately upon completing his draft of the Massachusetts Constitution in 1779, a set of convictions that arose entirely out of his political experience in America and his frustrating relationship with Congress during his first, brief diplomatic mission to France, was essentially what he believed in his

major published works in 1787–91, in his private correspondence from 1787 to 1790, and in all his writings in retirement until his death in 1826.

At the core of Adams's commitment to executive authority was his belief that the executive must be a fully coequal member of a tripartite legislative power, a power that he equated with the essence of sovereignty in any sound republic. This meant, first of all, that the executive must be allowed an absolute veto over any bill that passed both the lower and upper houses of a state's or nation's legislature. Anything less would make the executive an unequal member of the legislature, and would thereby fatally curtail his ability to defend his vital executive powers from legislative attack. Moreover, he believed this legislative equality should be openly and formally acknowledged in every republican constitution. One can see this conviction quite early in Adams's political writings: in his Clarendon letters of 1766 (see chap. 1), in an important oration given at Braintree in 1772 (chap. 2), and in his *Letters of Novanglus* of 1775 (chap. 4). The theme continues in his *Thoughts on Government* of 1776 (chap. 5), and in both his 1779 draft of the Massachusetts Constitution and his private correspondence defending that document (chap. 6). In the 1780s and 1790s, Adams would return to this central idea in his major writings (chaps. 8 and 9), and he never abandoned it.

Yet another feature of Adams's executive was its increasingly close connection with his view of the British monarchy. In the 1760s he paid relatively little attention to Britain's king; in the early 1770s, like most Massachusetts Whigs, he occasionally expressed hostility to the institution of the Crown but only as an aside to his more pointed assaults on parliamentary power. But in 1775, in his *Letters of Novanglus*, while giving no quarter to Parliament's claims to authority in America, he suddenly pulled Britain's monarchy into the republican world that he was beginning to construct for America by declaring: "If Aristotle, Livy, and Harrington knew what a republic was, the British Constitution. . . . is nothing more nor less than a republic, in which the king is first magistrate. This office being hereditary, and being possessed of such ample and splendid prerogatives, is no objection to the government's being a republic, as long as it is bound by fixed laws, which the people have a voice in making, and a right to defend."[12]

Adams made this connection again, more briefly, in *Thoughts on Government* in 1776, but thereafter it disappeared from his writings for more than a decade. In 1787, however, in the first volume of his *Defence of the Constitutions*, he formally labeled Great Britain's government a "monarchical republic," and a most admirable one. Finally, in 1789, in a letter to Roger Sherman, he declared that the United States, rightly understood, was in effect an elective monarchical republic and argued that the Constitution's only major defect was its denying America's president a full legislative veto and the prerogative powers that an executive ought to have, powers enjoyed, he believed, by Great Britain's king.[13]

When viewed over some six decades, John Adams's commitment to a powerful executive as the central element in any effective republic gained steadily in strength and complexity. Any opposition to this idea—as to most of his firmly held ideas—only increased his passionate devotion to it. The one qualification to this pattern was his decision, in 1791, to cease writing about his political beliefs in the interest of calming America's partisan passions, a decision that he adhered to for well over a decade. But when he resumed his political writing in 1807, he defended executive power, as well as his views on aristocracy and the general nature of republican government and society, with as much spirit as ever.

Adams's ideas about the proper role of *aristocracy* in a republic developed in a quite different fashion from his ideas about the executive, and they eventually took a form even more at variance with those of his countrymen. For more than a decade after he began writing for the public, during which he published all his important political writings through *Thoughts on Government*, he did not explicitly express any ideas about aristocracy, and only occasionally did he hint, in his diary and family letters, at his largely unconscious attitudes and feelings on the subject. The reasons for this will merit a full exploration (see chap. 7), but, stated simply, he grew up in a province whose political aristocracy was so thoroughly integrated into the life of the whole society that it attracted relatively little notice and, at least for a person of John Adams's particular background, little resentment. This remained true even during the final rupture of Massachusetts's relationship with Great Britain from 1772 to 1776, when the majority of the province's upper class sided with its humbler Patriot neighbors and continued in leadership positions after Independence. As for Great Britain's grand aristocracy or its elegant counterparts in other European nations, John Adams knew little and cared little about them before Independence and cared rather less about them after Independence than many historians have imagined.

Not every young man in eighteenth-century Massachusetts would have felt this way. Those who were of more modest means and, more importantly, of more modest prospects than John Adams could harbor a keen resentment against the economic position and social behavior of their "betters." And some young men who enjoyed greater wealth and social position than Adams insensitively expressed an unmerited self-regard in their high station. From all the evidence we have, however, which in his case is quite considerable, Adams himself was generally satisfied with his social position in pre-Revolutionary Massachusetts. Firmly below, but adjacent to, the local aristocracy before he entered college, he moved into its periphery over the next decade and became a new and most promising member of Massachusetts's aristocracy of talent by his mid-thirties. Had the American Revolution not occurred, Adams would likely, through his exceptional abilities, have reached the highest level of the province's political and judicial elite and become a most respectable member of an established

aristocracy that faced no apparent challenge to its authority, nor any likelihood of a significant alteration in its membership for the foreseeable future.

But this was not to be. The turbulent political and social forces unleashed during the American Revolution had less immediate effect on Massachusetts's leading families than on the upper classes of most other colonies. But by 1776 the sudden recruitment of hundreds of new leaders in every state, the creation of a Continental army of many thousands, and the raising and spending of hundreds of thousands and then millions of dollars on military pay, food, and equipment, supplied in part by the capture of scores of rich naval cargoes by American privateers, began to reshape American society in every new state and at every social level. John Adams began to take notice of this in 1776, and over the next two years, focusing his gaze largely on Massachusetts from his seat in Congress, he began to express his concern that wealthy, ambitious men, including many who had just made their fortunes and played a dominant role in the rapidly expanding new economy, would, in their thirst for even greater riches and for political power, unbalance the new republican culture of his native state. What had been an aristocracy of old wealthy families was becoming an aristocracy of new men and new wealth. Adams's first brief diplomatic service in Europe, in 1778–79, only elevated his fears of aristocratic aggression. But now he added Americans from other states, including those serving in Europe and the members of Congress itself, to the list of powerful men who threatened republican America. When he came to draft the Massachusetts Constitution in the fall of 1779, these new fears hardened his resolve to create a powerful executive that could control the burgeoning new aristocracy.

There is an old notion that John Adams, a simple New England Yankee at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, came to admire aristocracy and advocate a prominent role for it in the new American nation as a result of his service at the aristocratic courts of France and Britain from 1778 to 1788. Mercy Otis Warren, a close friend of Adams before the Revolution, was among the first Americans to make this charge, in her 1805 *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*. The fact that Adams's *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*, which devoted considerable attention to the necessity of aristocracy in any republic, was written and first published in London, just as he neared the end of his diplomatic service, appeared to validate this claim. A careful examination of Adams's decade in Europe, however, strongly suggests that while his thinking about aristocracy did indeed evolve there, neither the foreign dignitaries nor the general culture that he encountered in European capitals prompted that evolution. It was, instead, Adams's difficult relationship with certain Americans in Europe, with others still in America, and above all with members of the U.S. Congress—aristocrats all, to Adams's way of thinking—that shaped his rapidly evolving ideas about republican aristocracy.

Nearly everything of any substance that John Adams wrote about aristocracy came in the latter stages of his career. In preparing his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States* (1787–88), he began to look at the role of aristocracy in republics in a comparative manner, tracing that political phenomenon in its institutional manifestations through dozens of ancient and modern republics. He did not yet ask himself just what aristocracy was, or how it came to exist, but three years later, in his "Discourses on Davila" (1790–91), he began to examine the links between aristocracy and human behavior. Only in retirement, however, in his letters to Benjamin Rush and Thomas Jefferson, in an unpublished critique of Senator James Hillhouse's proposed amendments to the Constitution, and in his lengthy reply to John Taylor of Caroline, a belated critic of Adams's *Defence*, did he finally spell out in detail the human traits and characteristics that he believed were essential to create an aristocrat in a republic. In the course of this extended exploration, Adams reached three conclusions that were particularly upsetting to his countrymen. Aristocracy, he demonstrated, was ubiquitous, found in every society and under every form of government across the globe. This led to his conviction that aristocracy was unavoidable and inevitable. Finally, he declared, aristocracy was more threatening to a republic than to any other form of government.

The most common misunderstanding about Adams's attitude toward aristocracy, from his own day to the present, is the belief that he admired and approved aristocracies as a whole and the individuals who composed them. He occasionally took note of this misapprehension and denied it, to no effect. But his entire written legacy on the subject makes it clear that Adams's attitude toward aristocracy, which had been one of unconscious acceptance and respect in Massachusetts before Independence, soon became one not of admiration but of fear. Adams himself said as much in 1787 when, in an exchange of views with Thomas Jefferson on the new federal Constitution that each diplomat had just received from America, he remarked: "You are afraid of the One [i.e., the new American president], and I of the Few [i.e., the new Senate]."[14] No political force, he believed, could more quickly corrupt and destroy republican government than the power of aristocracy. He would devote much of his intellectual energy from 1790 until his death expounding his views of how that danger might be contained in republican America.

No major element of John Adams's political thought is more difficult to characterize than his attitude toward *the people*. He wrote far less often about them than he did about either executive power or aristocracy, and at no point in his long career did he explore their identity in any depth. Moreover, unlike his views on the executive or on aristocracy, his conception of the people appears to have undergone no real development from the 1760s to the 1820s. For John Adams, the people were a given. But what was that given? The ubiquitous but elusive nature of the people in Western political thought compounds the difficulty

of answering this question. Yet on occasion Adams did express a clear image of the people, and at various points in his writing career he conveyed opinions of them that were quite at variance with those of his politically active contemporaries.

The people are everywhere, but in political terms, who should be counted among their number? Eighteenth-century Americans gave a fairly broad spectrum of answers to this question. Writers and active citizens—or, in a constitutional monarchy such as Great Britain, active subjects—who took a more expansive approach could articulate a definition that embraced the entire adult population that they could imagine as participants in political life, excluding only those whom long established economic practices and deep cultural beliefs barred from all consideration, primarily women and slaves. Even here, women were often regarded as a part of the people whose general welfare both executives and legislators must consider, a recognition they seldom extended to slaves, whose welfare, most free white men believed, was only their masters' concern. Another expansive approach, which could yield quite similar quantitative results, was to think of the people as the constituent power upon which every republic—and, according to both the social contract philosophers and John Adams, every constitutional monarchy—was ultimately based. A prominent example of this Lockean concept in action was the decision of the Massachusetts legislature in 1780 to submit the state's new constitution, which John Adams had drafted, to the entire free adult male population for ratification (see chap. 6).

Yet many leaders in Revolutionary America, including John Adams, took a more restrictive approach to the idea of the people. Most of the new American states that formed at or shortly after Independence distinguished between a broader constituent population and a narrower electorate that enjoyed regular voting rights. With the notable exception of Pennsylvania, all the original states required voters to hold a minimum amount of real or personal property, and several demanded that those who sought political office possess more considerable fortunes. And of all the new states, Massachusetts, with Adams's evident approval, and perhaps at his suggestion, set some of the highest property requirements, for both voting and holding office. In terms of electoral qualifications, there was a clear spectrum of opinion regarding who should be an active citizen, from the most expansive, in Pennsylvania and soon thereafter in Vermont, to the most restrictive, in Massachusetts and South Carolina, and John Adams was at the restrictive end.

In a conceptual sense, however, Adams restricted the people even more than the clauses of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 would suggest. Virtually alone among American political writers of the Revolutionary era, he embraced an image of the people—the Many, but never the whole—that curtailed their numbers at both ends, excluding both the poor and the wealthy. He never contemplated barring the wealthiest and most powerful members of society

from the electorate that would choose the lower house of a legislature, but he did hope to keep as many wealthy men as possible out of that lower house by creating for them an upper house that would be, in effect, exclusively theirs. For Adams, the Few must never be allowed to overawe, dominate, and corrupt the chamber of the Many.

Moreover, from Adams's earliest writings to his late works, the people appear in a largely defensive role in every constitutional monarchy or republic—in every free government—that he described. The representatives in his lower legislative house, the principal spokesmen of the people, could freely initiate legislation, but their essential role was to voice the people's concerns over government policy and to prevent any taxation that would harm the broad popular interest. As individuals, the people had two other roles beyond the ballot box: to serve on juries and to defend the republic by bearing arms in local militia units. All three functions envisioned the people, as the Many, tempering the form and limiting the effect of laws and executive actions that both the Few, the aristocrats, and the One, the executive, would initiate or administer, and which, without the people's defensive actions, might take on a dangerously excessive and even tyrannical character.

Finally, as Adams would make clear in his writings of the 1780s and 1790s, just as the people were never the entire population, or even the entire adult male population, of any society, they were never the sole and entire basis of sovereignty in any republic. They were, instead, a distinctive and eternal element of society, perhaps more than 90 percent of its whole (although Adams, unlike his republican mentor, James Harrington, rarely supplied numbers to more precisely define any social or political class).[15] In Adams's view, they always shared sovereignty with the Few, the aristocracy, and with the One, the executive, each of which represented an inherent, fundamental, and eternal element of a whole society. The primary obligations of the people in a republic were to keep themselves free of the corruption that a close association with the Few would inevitably bring upon them, to defend their economic interests by closely examining all proposed budgets and taxes, to ensure the fair execution of the law by serving as honest jurors, and to defend the whole republic against enemies foreign and domestic by faithful militia service. If they did all these things, they would always merit, and receive, the support of a virtuous executive, they would benefit from the controlled activity of a well-harnessed aristocracy, and they would live in a republic that would treat them with decency as free men.

5. Why Adams's Constitutional Thought Matters

The chapters that follow will try to answer three large questions: (1) What was the essence of John Adams's constitutional thought, when that thought is stripped of the misunderstandings and exaggerations of his admirers and detractors alike? (2) How did his constitutional thought develop over the course of

his long career as a writer and public official? (3) Why did his constitutional thought ultimately take the distinctive form that it did? Some specific answers to these questions have been sufficiently hinted at in this introduction; fuller statements are best left to the chapters as they unfold, and to the conclusion. But this is an appropriate place to ask why students of America's past should devote careful attention to the most distinctive ideas of a man who felt, in his long years of retirement, that he had already become irrelevant to his countrymen, that, indeed, he had "constantly lived in an enemies Country"; and whose political thought has been formally labeled irrelevant, in part, by the foremost constitutional historian of the American Revolution writing in our era.[16]

The simplest answer is that we can always learn about our national past from a fresh look at the political thought of a major thinker of our founding era. A fuller exposition of Adams's ideas may also help to explain—as it is in some measure explained by—the course of his public career. But there are broader reasons to reassess the republican thought of John Adams. First, it highlights the distinction between the older, more European-based republican tradition that generously accommodated aristocracies and executives with quasi-monarchical powers and the newer, more indigenous, more democratic republic that triumphed in America.

A critical assessment of these two republics, however, reveals a major paradox. No man is more closely associated with the new American republican model, at the national level, than James Madison. Yet it is clear from his writings of the 1780s that Madison's greatest political fear was of the people, acting in their several state legislatures, and in his tenth *Federalist* essay, as quoted in the preceding section, he undercuts any belief that he designed his republic for them. In developing his older, more European-derived model, however, John Adams declared that his greatest political fear was of aristocracy, not the people. His ideal republic was unambiguously designed to protect the people from the aristocracy, although Adams, like Madison, did not intend that republic to be run by the people.

Looking ahead from his own day, across the entire course of America's history as an independent nation, what can we conclude about John Adams's long-term relevance for his countrymen? We shall examine this question more closely at the end of this study, but we must acknowledge at the outset that several of Adams's favorite republican mechanisms—most crucially, an absolute veto and the nearly total control of appointive powers by the executive—which were never accepted or implemented, have appeared to be unnecessary to the safety of the American republic. James Madison and his colleagues at Philadelphia, by taking advantage of the vast size and economic diversity of their new nation, and thereby turning the widespread belief in the impossibility of large republics on its head, were able to devise protective safeguards that proved adequate to ensure the stability of the federal union up to the crisis of the 1860s. Thereafter,

a few substantive amendments to the Constitution and a few major decisions by the Supreme Court, with the support, or at least the acquiescence, of the majority of the people, brought the republic in stable form through all the stresses and challenges from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century. None of these formal alterations have included Adams's most distinctive republican proposals.[17]

Adams's predictive powers, however, both for America's national government and for American society, have been more impressive. Beginning in the 1770s, he fought for strong state executives, both in Congress and in his native Massachusetts, and by the late 1780s he had the gratification of seeing a considerable measure of success in nearly every state, and in the new federal government as well. Yet he still felt keenly the need for more authority for America's executive branches than his countrymen would ever formally grant, either locally or nationally. The long course of American history, however, has created a stronger national executive than the Philadelphia convention ever imagined; stronger, perhaps, than even Adams himself envisioned. Whether he would have been comfortable with America's imperial presidency that has emerged in stages—war by war—over the past seventy-five years can never be known. But of all the Founding Fathers, John Adams came the closest, in his fondest dreams for a republican executive, to articulating the authority of the modern American president who, more often than not, and without the constitutional changes that he thought were necessary, is able to exercise more power than Congress, and particularly that body of government which he most feared, the U.S. Senate.

Adams was at his most prescient, however, where he was most thoroughly misunderstood by his countrymen, in his warnings about the corrupting power of aristocracy. In the predominant sense of this term in eighteenth-century thought, both high and low, European and American, his fears, with reference to America, seemed simply preposterous. But John Adams's understanding of aristocracy, developed in detail in the 1780s and 1790s, and elaborated further during his long retirement, has a surprising relevance to the development of the relationship between America's political culture and its rapidly evolving socioeconomic structure, both in the nineteenth century's industrial and transportation revolutions and in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' communications revolution.

Following a principal argument of both Machiavelli and Harrington, John Adams always thought that the American republic would remain sound as long as the great bulk of property—which for Adams, like his English and European mentors, meant landed property—was dispersed among many hands. Danger would arise only when property became highly concentrated. The last remnants of a politically powerful landed aristocracy lost much of its cultural respectability in America with the passing of the Virginia dynasty in the 1820s but remained politically potent until the bloody collapse of the slaveholding power in

the 1860s. The balance of property in America moved from land (and slaves) to more fluid capital, first in the Northeast, and then across nearly every region of the nation. But this new property, progressing through oscillations to greater levels of concentration, has been the motivating power behind America's newer political aristocracies that have taken the general form that John Adams envisioned, a form we shall examine toward the end of the work now before the reader.

PART ONE

ADAMS MOVES TO THE CENTER

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I

A Provincial Reverence for the British Constitution

1735–1767

> Were I to define the British constitution, therefore, I should say, it is a limited monarchy, or a mixture of the three forms of government commonly known in the schools, reserving as much of the monarchical splendor, the aristocratical independency, and the democratical freedom, as are necessary, that each of these powers may have a controul both in legislation and execution, over the other two, for the preservation of the subjects liberty.
>
> *Clarendon to Pym, 27 January 1766*

Nearly every prominent leader of the American Revolution began life as a provincial. These subjects of Britain's rapidly expanding empire were native sons of the several provinces of British North America, and each felt the strongest ties of family and community, and often of ethnicity and religion, to his province. Most had reached their majority before the Stamp Act crisis first set America and Britain on a collision course, and many were well past the expected midpoint of their lives before they suddenly became aware that they might not die, as they had been born, as provincial subjects of a distant British monarch. Moreover, these men were proud provincials. Many felt keenly the cultural limitations of their still young and lightly populated colonies, and a few openly longed for the metropolitan world of London, but most British North Americans of any prominence not only accepted their provincial world; they respected it, they enjoyed it, and if called upon, they ardently defended it. After Independence even the most nationalistic of America's Revolutionary leaders, while aspiring to the broadest geographic and commercial future for their new nation, each retained a deep love for his home state—the former province that had been his real country—which he cherished until his death. No American leader was a more dedicated provincial—in 1765, in 1776, or in 1789—than the ardent nationalist John Adams, of Braintree, Massachusetts.[1]

1. Youth and Education: Braintree, Harvard, Worcester

The town of Braintree, in the eighteenth century, was rural without being either rustic or remote. With a small town center just ten miles south of Boston by good roads, broad beaches and saltwater marshes on Massachusetts Bay, and a substantial area and population, it remained mostly agricultural until the early nineteenth century. Following its initial settlement from England in the 1630s, the town attracted few persons from other New England communities and even fewer of any social prominence. The descendants of the first Puritan settlers thoroughly dominated the community at every level of education and income for more than two centuries. As an accessible, moderately prosperous coastal town, Braintree was a place where a small number of families first settled, in which a few thousand people were born over two centuries, from which several hundred moved steadily west and north and south—if often only a few towns away—and to which few returned. The two Braintree families that would achieve the greatest distinction, first the Quincys and, considerably later, the Adamses, had never lived in any other Massachusetts town, except when they pursued urban careers in Boston.[2]

Into this relatively static community, John Adams was born in 1735, the first child of "Deacon" John Adams (so named long after his death by historians to distinguish him from his famous son), a pious, well-respected fourth-generation Braintree farmer, and Susanna Boylston, the daughter of a more affluent resident of nearby Brookline, whose Boylston relatives included Boston merchants and a distinguished doctor who had pioneered in the treatment of smallpox. Deacon John Adams was of only middling social rank outside Braintree, but within the town, as a church deacon and longtime town selectman—and as the son of a church deacon and town selectman—he held a place just below his community's tiny upper class. And he, too, had more prominent relatives elsewhere in New England, including the politically influential Samuel Adamses—father and son—of Boston and at least three Harvard-educated ministers.[3]

It was to qualify for this last profession, the highest to which pious rural Yankee parents generally aspired for their sons, that Deacon John urged his firstborn to prepare for Harvard College. Neither the educational ambition nor the professional goal was a stretch of the imagination for Deacon Adams. Fifteen boys surnamed Adams had entered Harvard before 1750, about half of them from the extended Braintree family, and at least three from the Braintree line became ministers. The most important, for the deacon, was his elder brother, the Reverend Joseph Adams, who served as the minister at Newington, New Hampshire, for nearly sixty years. Young John, who loved Braintree's rural life and wished only to be a farmer, first strongly resisted his father's will. But in his fifteenth year he discovered the pleasures of learning, and in 1751, after some eighteen months of steady application to his books, he entered college with the

twenty-five-member class of 1755, in which he was ranked socially, like most Adamses who had matriculated at Harvard, squarely in the middle.[4]

Harvard College in 1751 was a decidedly small affair. A faculty of seven men—a president, two professors, and four tutors, all Harvard graduates—taught just under one hundred students in all four classes. The curriculum had no electives; every student took every course, in the same order. Most of the instruction for each entering class was by a single tutor, who shepherded his class through all four years. Only three subjects, mathematics, natural philosophy (i.e., natural science), and theology, were taught by the two professors who specialized in those fields of learning. Yet Harvard was of the first importance to John Adams. Braintree had, in Adams's opinion, at least one educated, competent teacher, his schoolmaster Joseph Marsh (Harvard 1728), but perhaps no more than one, and Marsh's entire duty was to drill the rudiments of Latin and mathematics into his young students.[5] In just four years, however, Harvard transformed John Adams from a raw Braintree youth into an aspiring, if still unsophisticated, provincial American who would soon display the broadest professional and intellectual ambitions.

The college effected this transformation in three quite disparate ways. It showed a relative openness to new religious and secular ideas and to current scientific knowledge; it maintained a challenging (if rigid and unimaginative) pedagogy; and, largely unconsciously, it deployed its greatest resource, its students. Adams was fortunate to attend Harvard when it was near the peak of its educational vitality as a colonial college. President Edward Holyoke and his small faculty stoutly defended the liberal arts as they saw them, provided excellent instruction in the natural sciences, and firmly resisted the evangelical Calvinist revival of the Great Awakening, which found no favor at Harvard. When Adams encountered eastern Massachusetts's growing interest in Arminian theology and the new ideas of the English and Scottish enlightenments, first in Braintree while he was still in college, and then in Worcester immediately after graduation, he was ready to respond with critical approval.[6]

John Adams and his classmates received their formal instruction from just two competent masters, the Class of 1755's tutor, Joseph Mayhew, and the Hollis Professor of Theology, Edward Wigglesworth, and from one superior teacher, the Hollis Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy, John Winthrop, the college's first distinguished astronomer. But as with any good college, much of the essence of a Harvard education, from its founding to the present day, has always been the knowledge and inspiration imparted by one student to another, and the class of 1755 was thought to have more distinguished members than any prior class since the 1720s. John Adams learned as much in long discussions with his classmates as he did in any course (except perhaps Professor Winthrop's), as he warmly acknowledged a half century later in brief tributes to those he most liked and admired. And due to Harvard's pre-Revolutionary tradition of ranking its

entering students according to the social status of their families, and to the work of a remarkable twentieth-century collective biographer, one can relate Adams to his college class in a way that suggests something of his social aspirations.[7]

From its first full decade of operation in the 1640s until 1770, Harvard's president and faculty admitted new students after individual interviews each summer around the time of its commencement in July, welcomed them in the early fall, and sometime in their first year arranged the class in an order they would both publish and observe at all college functions. These class lists were never alphabetical; every student, listed with his town of residence, was rank ordered according to the faculty's judgment of the relative social standing of his parents and other close relations. The reigning social norms of both province and college demanded that sons of ministers, judges, and provincial officials be placed ahead of boys from undistinguished families, and that the sons of Harvard's senior faculty and fellows of its corporation stand at or near the top.[8]

Harvard's ordering of the class of 1755 illustrates several of these criteria. The four ministers' sons were ranked from second to eighth; number two was a son of Cambridge's Rev. Nathaniel Appleton, a fellow of the Harvard Corporation. The list clearly had an economic dimension as well; of the fourteen students who either held a scholarship or waited on tables, or both, eight were below the middle-ranked Adams, and only five stood above him. Adams himself was the highest ranked of the six students awarded a Hollis scholarship, a support given to boys of modest means, usually because they declared an interest in studying for the ministry, as Adams himself may have done when he entered the college. The three classmates whom Adams most admired as scholars were ranked below him; all held Hollis scholarships, and two became ministers. Of his six friends ranked above him, however, only two held scholarships.[9]

Ranked fourteenth of twenty-five students, John Adams was placed well below all four classmates whose fathers were ministers, and below every student whose father was a coastal merchant, a judge, or a justice of the peace (but above the two sons of country doctors). In his autobiography, Adams mentions five classmates as particular friends, and he corresponded with another classmate soon after their graduation from college. All six were ranked higher than him, and four—Charles Cushing, of a prominent judicial clan; William Browne, of a wealthy Salem family, and later a Loyalist and a governor of Bermuda; Philip Livingston, a son of Robert Livingston, the lord of Livingston Manor in the province of New York; and John Wentworth, who would succeed his uncle as governor of New Hampshire, later become a Loyalist, and finally serve as governor of Nova Scotia—were placed first, third, fourth, and fifth. Does this suggest that John Adams was an early social climber? This may well have been true, and the question is significant in trying to understand the origins of Adams's political thought. During and after the Revolution the problematic role of aristocracy in a republic became a major theme in Adams's writings, and in

mid-eighteenth-century Massachusetts aristocracy began with the relationship of Harvard College students to their classmates.[10]

There is, however, another side to John Adams's college friendships. Of the four minister's sons in the class of 1755, only one, ranked well above Adams, became a minister, but eight other classmates, all ranked below Adams—two at the very bottom of the class—entered the clergy. Adams particularly praised the abilities of three Hollis scholarship boys and became quite friendly with two: Samuel Locke, the son of an innkeeper, who became not only a minister but president of Harvard College in the 1770s; and Moses Hemmenway, who became a minister in Wells, Maine, and one of Adams's lifelong friends. Of the six holders of Hollis scholarships, one left college before the end of his first year, four became ministers, and only one graduated to enter another profession: John Adams. But of the thirteen classmates ranked above Adams, just one became a minister; most became merchants, lawyers, or judges. Young John Adams, in making more friends ranked above him than below, probably was seeking his ideal society in college, but it was a society less of wealth than of secular ambition. What he was avoiding, perhaps at first unconsciously, but soon quite consciously, was the life of a New England clergyman.[11]

For the general biographer, John Adams's four years at Harvard College, which he deeply enjoyed, afford only the slimmest narrative but leave few unanswered questions. From his earliest diary entries, the bare college records, and his late autobiography, we know where and with whom he roomed, what he studied, the classmates he especially befriended, and something of what he thought of their abilities. In his autobiography, Adams also explains why he was moving toward the decision, by the time he graduated, to disappoint his father's hope that he prepare for the ministry and, instead, began to consider a career in the law.

For the student of John Adams's political thought, however, his college years seem almost a void. It is clear that Harvard students in the 1750s studied Latin and Greek, logic, rhetoric and theology, mathematics and natural philosophy (primarily physics and astronomy). What they evidently did not study, at least in any depth, was anything remotely resembling political theory. There is no firm evidence that John Adams even glanced at a single volume of political thought while at Harvard. Moreover, in his autobiography, written nearly fifty years after his graduation, Adams declared that mathematics and natural philosophy, not languages or literature, were both his favorite and his best subjects at Harvard. This memory appears sound; the only college classes he records in his early, fragmentary diary entries were those in natural philosophy taught by his favorite instructor, Professor John Winthrop. Beginning in the mid-1760s, however, Adams would, in the course of his political writings, reveal that the English Enlightenment's conception of nature had become a fundamental basis of his political philosophy.[12]

At his graduation from Harvard in 1755, John Adams was as happily unconcerned with latent provincial-metropolitan tensions as he was innocent of political theory. But he was far from unconcerned about the role he should play in the public world. He had to make some choice of a career, and as he was now an educated young man, his family, his classmates, and he himself expected that career to be one of visible service, no matter how prominent or lucrative, to the community. Two experiences during his college years shaped his determination to turn away from the pulpit and seek the most secular of eighteenth-century careers, the law.

In the fall of 1752, during Adams's second year in college, the members of Braintree's First Parish Church bitterly divided over the theology and supposed immoral behavior of its minister, the Reverend Lemuel Briant. The young pastor had become an outspoken supporter of Boston's Rev. Jonathan Mayhew, who openly advocated the Arminian doctrine that promised Christians a surer access to salvation than New England's orthodox Calvinist tradition would allow. Adams's father, as a church deacon and respected townsman, hosted two of the meetings designed to resolve the issue in his own home. Seventeen-year-old John closely followed the dispute, attended at least one of these meetings, and read several published essays generated by the controversy, but could come to no resolution of the contested issues. The whole sad affair, which ended in Briant's resigning his Braintree pulpit in 1753 (but not before his exoneration by the congregation), deeply moved young Adams, who was still considering entering the ministry. Writing in his autobiography some fifty years later, he remembered the lesson he drew from his agitated neighbors:

> I saw such a Spirit of Dogmatism and Bigotry in Clergy and Laity, that if I should be a Priest I must take my side, and pronounce as positively as any of them, or never get a Parish, or getting it must soon leave it. Very strong doubts arose in my mind, whether I was made for a Pulpit in such times, and I began to think of other Professions. I perceived very clearly, as I thought, that the Study of Theology and the pursuit of it as a Profession would involve me in endless Altercations and make my Life miserable, without any prospect of doing any good to my fellow Men.[13]

But if Braintree's first parish posed a troubled future, Harvard soon offered a more pleasing prospect. In his last two years at college Adams joined an informal speaking club where he was often called upon to read literary passages, "and it was whispered to me and circulated among others that I had some faculty for public Speaking and that I should make a better Lawyer than Divine. This last Idea was easily understood and embraced by me."[14] Between the aspiring student and a legal career, however, stood two obstacles. At midcentury, rural New England families were still deeply suspicious of the law, viewing it as an unprincipled, contentious profession. The Adamses of Braintree were no excep-

tion to this prejudice. But here young John was fortunate. As he remembered it, his mother understood his reservations about entering the pulpit, and his father, although disappointed, was reasonable. The second difficulty was more imposing: paying the required fee to an established lawyer for the only method of legal training available in colonial New England, reading law in that mentor's office under his direction, while feeding and clothing oneself during this period of study.[15]

On 16 July 1755, the day of his graduation from Harvard, Adams took his first tentative step on a path that might lead to a legal career. Still not entirely determined "whether I should study Divinity, Law or Physick," he "gave out that I would take a School." In the college's commencement exercises, he remembered, "I was somewhat remarked as a Respondent, and Mr. Maccarty of Worcester who was empowered by the Select Men of that Town to procure them a Latin Master for the Grammar School engaged me to undertake it."[16] Adams took up school teaching, as many new college graduates did, to gain time to puzzle out his future. Within a year he decided his course; in August 1756 he signed a contract to read law for two years with James Putnam, Worcester's leading attorney, while continuing teaching to pay for his training.[17]

In his three years at Worcester, Adams mostly endured teaching, which he quite disliked, pursued his legal studies with growing interest, and was drawn into spirited discussions about religion with several new acquaintances. Most of the men who initiated these exchanges were strongly influenced by new political and religious ideas associated with the English and Scottish Enlightenment, had become deeply alienated from New England's traditional Calvinist beliefs, and sought to persuade their more orthodox neighbors to abandon the doctrines of predestination and justification by faith. A few locally notorious deists flatly rejected both the Trinity and the divinity of Christ and, on occasion, even questioned the existence of an afterlife.

His new neighbors' arguments and their passion fascinated young John Adams, who was just then in the process of abandoning the tenets of Calvinism. But he found deism as distasteful as his old faith. In religion Adams, who was himself becoming a true son of the Enlightenment, would occupy a middle position between Trinitarian orthodoxy and skeptical Deism—an increasingly common stance in eastern Massachusetts—with little change from the mid-1750s until his death seventy years later. The principal effect of the impassioned exchanges in Worcester upon young Adams, however, was to confirm his resolve, first formed when he witnessed Braintree's controversy over the theology and character of Rev. Lemuel Briant, never to occupy a pulpit.[18]

During his brief residence in Worcester, in his remarkably candid but fragmentary diary and in several letters, both those finished and sent and others begun and abandoned, to a handful of friends and classmates from Braintree and Harvard, one begins to see John Adams maturing as a man and developing

as a legal intellect. Less evident, but making its first tantalizing appearance, is his interest in political matters, when in both his diary and his autobiography he introduces Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke (1678–1751), as his first political mentor. In March 1756, he was reading Bolingbroke's essays on political exile and on retirement and study. Nearly fifty years later, during his own retirement, Adams remembered bringing Bolingbroke's *The Idea of a Patriot King* and *Letters on the Study and Use of History* to Worcester in the summer of 1756. He had borrowed one or both works from a Braintree friend and neighbor, Edmund Quincy, and loaned both to his first legal mentor, James Putnam, who was so impressed with them that he ordered, for his own library, the first edition of Bolingbroke's collected political and historical essays, which had appeared in London in 1754. Adams later claimed to have read Putnam's entire five-volume set before departing from Worcester in 1758.[19]

Adams read Bolingbroke over a longer period, some fifty-five years, than any other author, and he read him closely. In 1756 he copied out several passages from the political essays, and after 1800 he entered into contentious arguments with the author in the margins of his copies of both the political and the philosophical essays. Yet Bolingbroke's impact upon Adams is somewhat ambiguous. Although he claimed to have read the author's complete works five times by 1813, he did not record what he thought of them at his first reading, in Worcester, and only set down his reactions to certain essays during his last readings, during his retirement. Looking back over nearly fifty years, he doubted that Bolingbroke had much influence on his political thought. Writing in his autobiography in 1804, he remarked: "I read him through, before the Year 1758 and . . . I have read him through at least twice since that time: But I confess without much good or harm. His Ideas on the English Constitution are correct and his Political Writings are worth something: but in a great part of them there is more of Faction than of Truth."[20]

Lord Bolingbroke was not a political philosopher, scientist, or historian, but rather a political moralist and a fierce, twice-exiled Tory critic of Britain's Whig oligarchy. Yet his essays were a logical starting point for a young man with an interest in the political world. He was a popular writer who was widely viewed, in Britain and America, as both politically interested and idealistic, partisan and patriotic. His endorsement of the study of history as the teaching of political philosophy by example strongly appealed to Adams. Bolingbroke also had a working familiarity with the central political concepts of ancient and modern history: of absolute and limited monarchy, of aristocracy and mixed government, of the Roman Republic and ancient democracies (although Adams would come to view him as naively misinformed about the last).

But Bolingbroke had little desire to weigh these elements critically, and no inclination to explore the broader concept of a republic. He accepted Britain's constitutional monarchy as a given, and in *The Patriot King* he argued that

under such a constitution a virtuous king could maintain his independence from the aristocratic lords in Parliament by allying with the people. The impact of this and other lessons from Bolingbroke on Adams in 1756 is unknown. But in the 1760s Adams would begin his career as a writer by arguing for political virtue against political faction in Massachusetts politics. And from the 1770s until his death, an extensively reworked concept of Bolingbroke's exalted view of the executive would come to occupy the center of Adams's political vision, a vision that was far more complex than any Bolingbroke had imagined.[21]

A fuller idea of John Adams's political thought in Worcester is unfortunately beyond the reach of historical memory. His splendid diary, so revealing on many subjects for the first half of 1756, breaks off in August for more than two years, just as he began his legal studies, and does not resume until his return to Braintree in the fall of 1758. His autobiography, except for its one reference to Bolingbroke, is equally silent. And his correspondence for these years is quite sparse. Adams's three years in Worcester were clearly important to his personal and intellectual growth, but the most one can say is that they prepared him for a legal career, for independent legal study, and perhaps for the further study of politics as well. Just one more fact suggests that he was thinking politically in these years. When he made his appearance at Harvard's commencement in July 1758 to defend his master's thesis—a common rite of passage for most eighteenth-century Harvard graduates three years after their first commencement—he chose to argue the affirmative to the proposition that civil government was necessary for man.[22]

2. The Young Lawyer in Braintree

In October 1758, John Adams, just twenty-three years old, returned from Worcester to Braintree, where he would live in his parents' house until his marriage in 1764, and thereafter in an adjacent house that he inherited from his father, except for two shorter residences in Boston, until the Revolution. There was nothing impulsive about this move. In April he announced to his classmate John Wentworth his pleasure in nearing the end of his brief teaching career and rejoiced in the prospect of abandoning the narrow confines of Worcester, where, he declared, his thoughts had been on nothing but "Oxen and Land and money and Stonewall and War." He wrote, too, of suffering from ill health and later recalled that "the Air of Worcester appeared unfriendly to me, to such a degree that I panted for want of the Breezes from the Sea." In August he completed his two years of study with attorney James Putnam, and by early October he was home again, planning how to launch his career as a young lawyer.[23]

A provincial love of his hometown, or perhaps a simple homesickness for his family, may have drawn Adams back to Braintree, but his move was part of a clear strategy to advance his legal career. From his birthplace he would have easy access to Boston, which was both the provincial capital and the county seat

of Suffolk County, in which Braintree was located. Yet what he hoped to do, as he later remembered it, was not to play the role of a city lawyer commuting from the country but to carve out a position as the first country lawyer in his still largely rural county, where all legal business was monopolized by its city attorneys.[24] Neither his novel strategy nor the comforts of home, however, fully relieved Adams's sense of insecurity. An acute awareness of not knowing how to begin, and a fear that he would not succeed, dominated his thoughts and feelings during his first years in his new calling.

In the hope of distinguishing himself from other fledgling attorneys and gaining the favor of Boston's senior lawyers, and as a genuine expression of his intellectual interests, Adams made another professional decision at the very outset of his career. He determined to become a learned lawyer, the equal if not the superior of any competitor, not only in the common law that he would use in his daily practice but in every branch of law that might possibly arise, or of which any other New England attorney might display a mastery. This was a most ambitious agenda, and in his autobiography Adams placed the inspiration for it in a crucial interview with Jeremiah Gridley, widely viewed as Boston's most learned attorney. Adams cast Gridley as his principal Boston mentor, an older colleague willing to present the legal beginner at court and declare not only the depth of the young man's commitment to the law but the breadth of his legal knowledge, long before he had any such knowledge. It was Gridley, Adams remembered, who set him to learning the intricacies of continental law far beyond the demands of his practice.[25]

In his diary, however, Adams records that he had already begun to acquire this learning before seeking out Gridley. He arrived from Worcester on 4 October, a Sunday, and devoted several hours on Monday to reading an edition of Justinian's *Institutes*, the foundation of continental or civil law, with Arnold Vinnius's notes, which he had borrowed, perhaps during Harvard's commencement in July, from the college library. His meeting with Gridley later in the month, however, did affirm, and extend, his aspirations. Gridley was surprised and impressed that Adams had sought out Harvard's volume of Justinian, which he thought must be the only copy in the province outside his own library. He was concerned that Vinnius's commentary was more appropriate for an older, more deeply read lawyer, but he showed Adams his own library of works on civil and international law and loaned him a more introductory volume to the civil law. Gridley then asked his young visitor if he had read any international law, and when Adams mentioned Burlamaqui, Heineccius, and Turnbull, Gridley approved, but exhorted him to add Grotius and Pufendorf. Adams came away deeply impressed with Gridley's kindness and erudition and strongly confirmed in his own intellectual ambition.[26]

Jeremiah Gridley also kept his promise, made that day, to formally introduce Adams to the Inferior Court of Common Pleas for Suffolk County. In

early November, he presented his young colleague and testified to his "Proficiency in the Principles of the Law"; and immediately following Adams's swearing in as a practicing attorney, Gridley introduced him to the members of the Boston bar. Gridley would remain a valued friend and mentor who encouraged Adams's legal ambitions, and following his death in 1767, Adams bought some two dozen titles from Gridley's impressive library, including the work that Gridley had loaned him in October 1758, Van Muyden's *Compendiosa Institutionum Justiniana*.[27]

The fall of 1758 was a turning point in John Adams's professional and intellectual life. His own testimony leaves little doubt of this; his diary, silent for two years, suddenly becomes full and intimate, exploring both the general state of his mind and his feelings about his professional triumphs, anxieties, and occasional failures. His autobiography, too, is more detailed for the fall of 1758 than for any other period before the 1770s.[28] What is most impressive about young Adams, however, is the height of his legal ambition as he entered his twenty-fourth year, and his ability to pursue that ambition for more than a decade, until he became the most learned lawyer in the province.

Yet the breadth of John Adams's learning by his midthirties, while exceptional among Massachusetts lawyers, was neither unprecedented nor without immediate professional benefit. In October 1758, he speculated that Boston's two most eminent lawyers, Gridley and Benjamin Prat, would be impressed with his intellectual ambition, and before the month was out, Gridley (although not Prat) proved him right. He progressed from pleading before the local Inferior Court in 1758 to arguing before the Superior Court in 1761, and in 1762 he was admitted to the new rank of barrister before the Superior Court, the highest formal distinction enjoyed by a practicing Massachusetts lawyer. That same year he began to expand his practice by riding circuit to court days in adjacent Massachusetts counties, and later he extended these travels as far north as the district of Maine.[29] In the courtroom, most clearly in the Boston Massacre trials of 1770, he displayed a broader learning than the case required, but he secured his clients' acquittal and gained an unrivaled reputation for his brilliance. Even before those trials, he had become one of the busiest lawyers in the province, sought after by both affluent urban and modest rural clients from Cape Cod to Maine. As early as 1768, Crown officials attempted to recruit him to their side, and by 1773 the provincial legislature regarded him as Massachusetts's greatest legal authority. [30]

John Adams's legal life quickly became as full and satisfying, on its own terms, as he could have desired. But he soon discovered that he wanted something more than a legal life and that, indeed, there could be more to the law itself, especially as he had chosen to define it, than being an attorney. In 1760, now making visible progress as a country lawyer, he took his first tentative steps toward a more public role, as a writer on political and social issues.[31] His first

essays, although never published in his lifetime, reveal his earliest formal thinking on a major focus of his mature political thought: aristocracy.

Stephen Sewall, the chief justice of Massachusetts's Superior Court, died in September 1760. As Governor Bernard pondered whom to appoint to this important position, the public speculated on the chances of several possible contenders. John Adams is not known to have favored any one person, but he had a clear idea of a proper candidate: someone well trained and thoroughly read, from early adulthood, in every corner of British North America's vast legal landscape, the common, civil, and admiralty law, the law of nations, the most ancient precedents, and the most recent statutes. In November, in a brief and perhaps incomplete draft of an essay written as if intended for a Boston newspaper, this legal novice, just turned twenty-five, declared that no man "whose Youth and Spirits and Strength, have been spent in Husbandry Merchandize, [or] Polticks" could ever master "so immense and involved a science" as the law. Soon thereafter, Bernard named to the bench his lieutenant governor, Thomas Hutchinson, a merchant and lower court judge with no formal training in the law, after rejecting at least two other politically prominent candidates with equally modest legal credentials.[32]

Adams's immediate reaction to Hutchinson's appointment is unknown. But in urging extensive legal experience for Massachusetts's highest judge, he was not trying to maintain the quality of the bench but to raise it. Chief Justice Sewall had only begun, in a midlife career change, to study law shortly before joining the Superior Court in 1739; he had never read law with an attorney, practiced law, or served on an inferior court; and in his eight years as chief justice, only one of his five colleagues had not served on a lower court. No Superior Court judge sitting between 1752 and 1766, however, was a trained lawyer. Adams's argument in 1760, that a public office ought to be filled by a man with both appropriate and impressive qualifications to the task at hand—a thoroughly professional criterion that Massachusetts's governors had not been honoring in their judicial appointments—remained his position throughout his long career. It became one enduring element, the least complicated element, in John Adams's conception of aristocracy, an aristocracy of merit.[33]

Adams's first attempt at addressing the public on a current issue, however, began six months earlier and continued through four drafts written over a full year. In May 1760, he composed a spirited essay against the proliferation of taverns in Braintree and other towns throughout the province. This was a quixotic venture for a young man seeking to enter public life and, for an Adams, an ironic one as well. From his immigrant ancestor Henry Adams to his city cousin, Samuel, one or more Adams in each generation, in Braintree or in Boston, had been brewers or maltsters. And he gained no widespread affection from his townsmen for his troubles, as he confessed many years later to his good friend, Dr. Benjamin Rush. But if he had a political objective this early in his career, it

was not popularity (which would never be his objective) but the approval of both the more sober, prosperous town fathers in Braintree and Massachusetts's ruling elite. In Braintree, at least, he achieved his immediate goal; in May 1761 the town approved a new ordinance sharply curtailing the issuance of tavern licenses.[34]

In his brief essay and its three sequels Adams made the usual social objections against public houses: they led to the impoverishment of many members of the community; they created places that were so unwholesome they could not serve as respectable taverns for travelers; and they gave their town a bad name. His most substantial objection, however, was explicitly political: "But the worst Effect of all, and which ought to make every Man who has the least sense of his Priviledges tremble, these Houses are become in many Places the Nurseries of our Legislators;—An Artful Man, who has neither sense nor sentiment may by gaining a little sway among the Rabble of a Town, multiply Taverns and Dram Shops and thereby secure the Votes of Taverner and Retailer and of all, and the Multiplication of Taverns will make many who may be induced by Phlip and Rum to Vote for any Man whatever."[35]

Adams's appeal to "every Man who has the least sense of his Priviledges" neatly expresses the acute class consciousness of a young man who was at once a member of Massachusetts's broad rural middle class, a rising new figure in Braintree's tiny aristocracy, and (as the flattering Colonel Quincy would soon suggest) a likely recruit to Boston's more substantial elite. In this respect, the motivation behind John Adams's stern imprecations against taverns in 1760 perhaps differed little from that which impelled James Madison to denounce debtor-dominated legislatures in the 1780s.[36] Inebriated farmers and impoverished debtors alike threatened a productive gentry-dominated economy and the existing social order. Whatever Adams may have thought or written at any time about the people and democracy—and he wrote many things, both positive and negative—in this earliest essay he chose not to identify with the people.

At the heart of Adams's problem with taverns was their role as "the Nurseries of our Legislatures," the most pernicious corruptors of the body politic.[37] If one were to read only his tavern essays, however, there would be nothing remarkable in his image of "an Artful Man, who has neither sense nor sentiment" gaining "a little sway among the Rabble of a town." In 1760 Adams's Braintree had a small aristocracy, and he was becoming a part of that aristocracy. He believed this worthy social class must assert its control over the people, who were weak and corruptible. Adams's steady adherence to the problem of maintaining political integrity in New England, however, combined with the unprecedented political and social developments of the 1770s and 1780s, would eventually force him to reexamine the nature of both the "Artful Man" and "the Rabble" whom the "Artful Man" sought to corrupt.

On 25 May 1761, just a week after Braintree voted to restrict tavern licenses, Deacon John Adams succumbed to an epidemic fever. Young John Adams now

became the eldest male in his small family, which included his widowed mother and two younger adult brothers, both unmarried. Because Deacon Adams had paid for his firstborn son's college education, he left him less real property than he bequeathed to his brothers. But he did leave John a small but sufficient house, with several acres of land, just yards away from the family home. In November, Adams set up his law office on the ground floor of this structure, with a door opening right onto the town's principal road, but he continued to live next door with his mother and his brothers.[38]

Adams's promotion to head of a well-known Braintree family, however sad he felt at the cause of that promotion, coincided with his rapid rise in town affairs. In March 1761, just two months before his father's death, he was engaged in an official survey of the community's roads; in May the town meeting approved his proposal to reduce the number of taverns. Adams quickly exercised his new political influence; in June he arranged for his brother, Peter Boylston Adams, to be appointed a deputy sheriff of Suffolk County. And the following March the town appointed him to a committee to bring in a plan to sell off Braintree's South Common lands.[39] By August 1762, upon his promotion to barrister, the twenty-six-year-old Braintree lawyer was beginning to enjoy prominence and prosperity in his profession while rapidly assuming the political power that both his father and grandfather had exercised in his community. Just four years after his return to Braintree, John Adams had achieved the goal he set for himself as he left Worcester—to make a successful career as the first country lawyer in Suffolk County.

3. First Writings and Marriage

Nearly every decision that John Adams had made since 1758 pointed him in the direction of a local career. He chose to be not only a country lawyer but a Braintree lawyer. He lived with his parents, established his office in a house bordering on his family's front yard, and threw himself into town politics, where he appeared in the traditional roles of heir to his father and mentor to his brother. Only his larger intellectual ambition, to master every branch of law, suggested that he might, at some point, look beyond the narrow confines of Braintree. Yet by 1762 he was moving toward another parochial decision, to marry locally.

In October 1758, Jeremiah Gridley had advised his young colleague not to marry young; it would restrict his time to study the law and would damage his career. Adams probably appreciated this advice—in 1758 he hardly had the financial resources to marry—but he did not long delay showing an interest in a few suitable young women in his neighborhood. In 1761, Colonel Josiah Quincy declared that Adams's outstanding legal ability would soon qualify him to offer his attentions to the daughters of some of Boston's most prosperous merchants, who would be only too happy to welcome so promising a lawyer into their families. Adams promptly dismissed this as flattery, but Quincy's remarks are particu-

larly interesting because two years earlier, in 1759, Adams was paying serious attention to the colonel's daughter, Hannah, who was about a year his junior. That match never occurred; Adams probably felt he was not financially ready to marry even an heiress, and it seems clear that he rather disliked Hannah's father. But the courtship showed both that he was prepared to consider a highly advantageous alliance—a continuation of the social climbing that he appears to have engaged in at Harvard—and that, again, he was thinking locally. Why bother pursuing a Boston heiress when a young woman of good fortune lived just three miles to the north, in one branch of Braintree's first family?[40]

By the time Colonel Quincy was flattering Adams, however, the young attorney had already shifted his gaze some four miles to the east, to the home of the Reverend William Smith, pastor of the First Church in neighboring Weymouth. The object of his attentions was Smith's second daughter, Abigail. She had just turned seventeen when Adams first recorded a strong interest in her in December 1761, although he had taken note of her in his diary as early as 1759, while he was still courting Hannah Quincy. The Reverend Smith was far less wealthy and prominent than Colonel Quincy, but Abigail herself was almost as local a match as Hannah, and hardly lacked distinguished connections. Her mother was Elizabeth Quincy, daughter of yet another branch of Braintree's leading family. Any fantasies of marrying a Boston heiress, if Adams ever entertained them, were soon forgotten; he courted only in his neighborhood.[41]

Over a year before he married Abigail Smith, however, John Adams took another major step in his career. He began writing political essays for the Boston press. And as he struggled to find his proper voice and his larger objective as a writer, he quickly abandoned his localism by embracing a style that celebrated the unsophisticated rural life to the point of parody.

Between February and September 1763, Adams drafted at least nine essays and one private letter devoted to an assortment of current public issues, including a recent flare up of factional politics in the press, the problem of public insults and affairs of honor, and the depressed state of Massachusetts agriculture following the end of the Seven Years' (French and Indian) War. In sharp contrast to his unpublished essays against taverns of 1760–61, none of these pieces were addressed to the largely local audience that he served as an attorney. His first effort, a brief draft in his diary that deplored the blinding effect of factional loyalty on rational thought and behavior, is so ragged that it may have been intended more as a memorandum of ideas than the draft of an essay. But Adams published seven of the eight essays that followed in two Boston newspapers, and he later recorded that he gained some reputation for humor, if not for profundity, from these first writings.[42]

John Adams's first published work, appearing in the *Boston Evening Post* on 14 March 1763, was squarely addressed to the politically active population of the whole province. His choice of a pseudonym, "Humphrey Ploughjogger," and his

implausibly crude spelling, make this abundantly clear. But his decision to adopt a deliberately jocular name and exaggeratedly rustic style was no innovation. The literary tradition of lampooning the crudities of country life was well established in England, even by authors, like Henry Fielding, who loved the countryside and the simplicity of country manners. Closer to home, British America's most popular author, Benjamin Franklin, had pioneered the related persona of modest urbanites who satirized their wealthier, more educated (and often more pious) social betters, in Boston as the widow "Silence Dogood" in the 1720s and in Philadelphia as "Poor Richard" in the 1730s, 1740s, and 1750s. Adams, like Franklin, called on the sturdy moral virtue of his protagonist to issue several barbs against city sophisticates and endorse the common sense of common people. As a satirist and social critic, the young essayist was in good company.[43]

The issue that invited Adams's first appearance in the press was the ongoing feud between James Otis Jr. and Governor Francis Bernard, prompted by Bernard's appointment, in 1760, of his lieutenant governor, Thomas Hutchinson, as chief justice of the province's Superior Court, a post that, Otis claimed, had been promised to his father by the previous governor. But Adams, although he greatly admired Otis's oratory in the writs of assistance case (1761), and probably already disliked both Bernard and Hutchinson, had no intention of engaging in the dispute itself, and he never referred to it directly. Instead, in this brief, rather disorganized piece, he condemned factional controversy in general terms, neatly summarized the advantages (in local trade) and disadvantages (in taxation) of a standing army, and closed with a Yankee farmer's short list of the vanities of this world: Boston taxes, proud Anglican ministers, popery, and the Stuart pretender. "Humphrey Ploughjogger" showed little promise of making a second appearance or of contributing anything beyond preposterous spelling to Boston readers.[44]

Adams, however, was more deeply upset over the Otis-Bernard controversy than "Humphrey Ploughjogger" had let on. When Otis had launched his latest assault on Bernard in late 1762, Adams's friend Jonathan Sewall, signing himself "J," sprang to the defense, attacking Otis repeatedly through the winter and spring of 1763. Adams hoped his friend would soon cease his broadsides, and perhaps he thought that "Humphrey's" quick barb at factionalism in March would bring Sewall to his senses. He even began a most candid letter to Sewall, in which he declared that his friend, in taking one side of a political dispute, was either "an hireling Scribbler" or "a silly, undistinguishing Jack Tar, . . . who never lookest into the Right and Wrong the True or the false, but eer fightest valiantly, whenever the Master gives a dram and pointeth out an Antagonist." Disdaining the slightest reference to the issues under contention, Adams declared: "Both Parties deserve Curses.—Both Parties will sacrifice the good of their Country, to their own Malice, Envy, Revenge, Avarice, Ambition or Lust." He never finished or sent this letter, and thus may have avoided the early demise of the first of three close friendships that he later listed as casualties of America's

dispute with Britain. In this draft, however, John Adams recorded his first known disrespect of the British Empire when he compared the hypocrisy of Boston's factions to London's coffeehouse politicians who praised "Poor, virtuous, modest, Pious Phylosophical England, allways attentive to the Interests of human Nature, the Rights and Liberties of Mankind," in its thoroughly self-interested contest with France, which they accused of "perpetual Hankerings . . . after universal Monarchy."[45]

In June 1763, with no sign that Jonathan Sewall had finished attacking Otis, Adams returned to print, again as "Humphrey Ploughjogger" in the *Boston Evening Post*. "Humphrey"'s second essay was longer and better organized than his first, and his rustic spelling was much improved, as he admitted. But Adams now shifted tactics in his effort to improve the life of his province. After briefly condemning factional controversy, again without reference to Sewall, Otis, or anyone else, he turned to lamenting the hard times faced by Massachusetts farmers in the depressed postwar economy, and he proposed a solution. Provincial leaders should end their political controversies, turn to caring for their distressed countrymen, and teach them how to become more prosperous. Adams continued this line in July, over the signature "U," in the *Boston Gazette*. Opening with a condemnation of the pursuit of knowledge in mathematics (which Adams personally loved), geology, zoology, and all predestination theology (which he did indeed dislike) as useless to the broader population, he urged all learned men, especially ministers and physicians, to turn their attention to the scientific study of agriculture. Remarking that the recent appeal for agricultural improvement by "Humphrey Ploughjogger" had spurred his interest, he argued that Massachusetts, no longer even self-sufficient in grain production, must cultivate new crops. "U" ended with a brief summary of the proper cultivation and processing of hemp as a most profitable agricultural venture.[46]

From his earliest surviving writing in his diary to his last personal letters, John Adams was always a vivid stylist, but formal essays were another matter. He had to work hard at developing a coherent organization and an effective prose style in pieces of any length addressed to a general audience. Part of the excitement in reading his early formal prose, from his unpublished attacks on Braintree taverns through his "Humphrey Ploughjogger" and "U" essays, is seeing Adams the writer emerge.

On 1 August 1763, Adams published his first solid, well-argued essay, again as "U." His likely motivation for this endeavor—an ongoing physical and verbal battle between two Massachusetts legislators, General William Brattle and Colonel John Murray, in which Brattle had retained Adams as his legal counsel to seek damages from Murray—was both narrower and more self-interested than his alarm over factional conflicts in the Boston press or his distress at the province's agricultural stagnation, but Adams made much more of this opportunity. Scrupulously avoiding any mention of the Brattle-Murray affair, he

attacked the tradition of private revenge by presenting his first coherent view of civilized society. Beginning with the teaching of the social contract theorists Hobbes and Locke (whom he did not name) that mankind had chosen to replace the individualistic, barbaric state of nature with organized government in order to curb and control violence, he argued that every armed man and every group of men under arms, no matter how strong, was subject to legal restraint. He rejected Montesquieu's assertion that armies would not respect civilian authority, declaring that in the English-speaking world every "Gentleman of Sense and Breeding" under arms understood that "the Common Law of England, is Superiour to all other Laws Martial or Common, in every English Government." This reference to Montesquieu, incidentally, is Adams's first mention of any political theorist in his published writings.[47]

Toward the end of August, "U" appeared again in the *Boston Gazette*. Following an introduction that repeated the author's concerns over political faction, private revenge, and agricultural improvement, the essay begins to probe the underlying causes of political controversy. The problem, "U" declares, is man's self-deception, his unwillingness to examine his own motives for possible impurities, and his opponents' motives for possible virtues. Then, for the first time in his published work, Adams states his view of the proper form and purpose of the constitution under which the voters of Massachusetts lived, and his view of their proper duty as voters:

> We *Electors* have an important *constitutional* power placed in our hands: We have a check upon two branches of the legislature, as each branch has upon the other two; the power I mean of electing, at stated periods, *one* branch, which branch has the power of electing another. It becomes necessary to every subject, then, to be in some degree a *statesman*: and to examine and judge for *himself* of the *tendency* of political *principles* and *measures*. Let us examine them with a *sober*, a *manly*, a *British*, and a *Christian* spirit. Let us neglect all *party* virulence and advert to *facts*. Let us believe no man to be *infallible* or *impeccable* in government, any more than in religion: take no man's word against evidence, nor *implicitly* adopt the sentiments of others, who may be deceived themselves, or may be *interested* in deceiving us.[48]

Shortly after the publication of his third "U" essay, Adams completed a more concise statement of his political (and psychological) beliefs, which he entitled "All Men would be Tyrants if they could." It was clearly intended as a sequel to his 29 August essay; its stated objective, to explain in greater detail "the moral and political Principles, contained [in] my former Essay upon Self Decipt," refers unmistakably to that piece. For whatever reason, he never published this most powerful of his 1763 essays, but he did not forget it. The core problem, expressed in one of Adams's most terrifying passages, was that

> the selfish Passions, are stronger than the social, [so that] any Man, left to the natural Emotions of his own Mind, unrestrained and unchecked by other Power extrinsic to himself . . . would soon be brought to think, by the strong Effervescence of his selfish Passions against the weaker Efforts of his social [Passions] in opposition to them, that he was more important, more deserving, knowing and [necessary?] than he is, and that he was doing but his Duty in punishing with great Cruelty those who would esteem him no higher and shew him no more Reverence and give him no more Money and Power than he deserved.[49]

As this was "no new Discovery," men had constructed "the wisest and best of Governments . . . calculated on Purpose, to controul and counteract the Ruinous Tendency of this Imperfection in our Natures." Because both armies and the clergy had been particularly susceptible to exercising tyrannical power, he continued, "our Constitution, has laid for its Basis, this Principle, that all such unnatural Powers, as those of Arms and those of Confessions and Absolution for sin, should always bow to the civil orders that Constitute the State." But because even the civil power might be corrupted, the constitution had also provided against this danger:

> No simple Form of Government, can possibly secure Men against the Violences of Power. Simple Monarchy will soon mould itself into Despotism, Aristocracy will soon commence an Oligarchy, and Democracy, will soon degenerate into an Anarchy, such an Anarchy that every Man will do what is right in his own Eyes, and no Mans life or Property or Reputation or Liberty will be secure and every one of these [forms of government] will soon mould itself into a system of subordination of all the moral Virtues, and Intellectual Abilities, all the Powers of Wealth, Beauty, Wit, and Science, to the wanton Pleasures, the capricious Will, and the execrable Cruelty of one or a very few.

After putting this remarkable declaration aside for some four decades, Adams came upon it and wrote at the bottom: "This last Paragraph has been the Creed of my whole Life and is now March 27 1807 as much approved as it was when it was written by John Adams."[50]

Having scaled the heights of his rhetoric and plumbed the depths of his thought and feeling in just under a thousand words, Adams quietly filed this splendid piece away and finished up his writing for 1763 in two contrasting essays published on the same day in two different newspapers. His last piece for the season as "U" appeared on 5 September in the *Boston Gazette*, just as "Humphrey Ploughjogger" finished his summer in the *Boston Evening Post*. His fourth essay as "U," a spirited response to critics of his second "U" essay of 18 August, extended his condemnation of private revenge and individual violence, against

which he took a firm line, allowing a plea of self-defense only under conditions of absolute necessity. Again he placed civil over martial law and praised English common law as the finest of all legal systems, ancient or modern, before asserting that only the law, never violence, must be the individual's sole recourse to any offense. And, in an extremely rare case of dissimulation by John Adams, "U" obliquely denied that he had any vested interest in such legal controversies and stated that he was not a lawyer, or indeed a professional of any kind.[51]

Adams ended his "Humphrey Ploughjogger" series as he had begun it, in high good humor, with a full stock of comic tricks. "Humphrey's" spelling continued to improve, but his sentiments were as rural and Yankee as ever. Casting this piece as a list of things he liked and disliked about the essays of "U," "Humphrey" opposed that author's dismissal of Calvinist theology and original sin, and professed his pleasure in reading the sermons of New England divines. He opposed "U"'s advice that ministers study agriculture rather than theology with the observation: "Our ministers are worldly-minded enuff, aready." He thought lawyers were useless, or worse. And in a sly turn, Adams, as "Humphrey Ploughjogger," took "U" to task for picking a quarrel with "J" [Jonathan Sewall], thereby turning against himself (or one of his selves) the dislike of political factionalism that first motivated him to write. But he liked "U"'s advice that doctors study agriculture and thoroughly enjoyed his Latin quotations, which he gamely tried to unravel. "Humphrey" was especially pleased with the passage from Juvenal that "U" quoted in his 18 July essay and proceeded to supply a colorfully free translation of it, with the assistance of an unidentified—and surely imaginary—local schoolmaster.[52]

John Adams's first venture into print was a striking success. Over ten weeks in the summer of 1763 he had published seven essays in two Boston newspapers, addressed three timely topics—political factionalism, private revenge, and the need for agricultural innovation—and introduced two contrasting characters to the public. He had even staged a mock attack by his rural Yankee upon his city sophisticate, and he later remembered that "Ploughjogger"'s prose "excited more merriment than all my other writings together."[53] As one essay followed another, Adams's style and organization steadily improved, so that by September 1763, he could write a clear, effective piece of some two or three thousand words, a task that had recently appeared, from his rough tavern essays of 1760–61, to be quite beyond him. He had found a voice—indeed, two voices—and displayed a mastery of several themes. What John Adams had not yet done, however, was find a theme that was distinctly his.

Or had he? There is no obvious explanation for Adams's failure to publish his finest essay of 1763, "All men would be Tyrants if they could," but its very focus and power may suggest an answer. "Tyrants" was an unmistakable continuation of his discussion, in his third "U" essay, of the role of self-love and self-delusion in generating political controversies. Adams's grandson, Charles

Francis Adams, rightly impressed with this third essay, published it under the title "On Self-Delusion," along with the second and fourth "U" essays, each under the title "On Private Revenge," in his edition of the *Works of John Adams*.[54] But the "Tyrants" essay (which Charles Francis Adams did not publish) differed in two essentials from all his other early efforts. First, it addressed exclusively a single topic, where every other essay, however focused on one theme, strayed at some point into the territory of one or two others. Second, it was harsher medicine than anything Adams had written before. If his Massachusetts neighbors had been able to read the "Tyrants" essay, they could have thanked their political good fortune in living under so robust a constitution, but they could scarcely have thought better of themselves, of their essential human condition, than they would after reading a caustic sermon by Jonathan Edwards. Perhaps the publisher of the *Boston Gazette* was fearful that the piece would upset his readers. It seems likelier, however, that Adams himself recognized that his "Tyrants" essay did not really fit with "U"'s earlier efforts. And perhaps, too, he somehow sensed, if he did not yet understand, that in 1763 he was not quite ready to appear in print as what he would soon become, a political and psychological writer of unusual perception and force.

In 1764 John Adams wrote nothing for the Boston press and apparently made no attempt to do so. Perhaps he was mulling over where he stood as a writer, and where he might go. Perhaps no current issue excited him so much as the Otis-Bernard and the Brattle-Murray controversies had done a year earlier. But he was far from idle. His legal practice continued to grow and demanded increasing attention. In the spring of 1764, he pursued his courtship of Abigail Smith in Weymouth and underwent an inoculation and quarantine for smallpox in Boston.[55] And on 25 October 1764, just six days before his twenty-ninth birthday, he married Abigail and took her home to Braintree, where they lived for most of the next decade. One cannot point to any particular effect of his marriage upon his political thought, but John Adams himself always believed this union had the most salutary effect on everything he did, and everything he was. He had finally become a fully mature adult, with all of the responsibilities and opportunities of that condition. And as he observed other marriages around him, he became convinced that his family was a tiny, balanced republic (with himself as its chief executive, of course), and not the fearsome absolute monarchy that disfigured the lives of some of his friends and neighbors.[56]

4. *A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* and the Stamp Act

The year 1765 marked a critical turn in the relationship between Great Britain and its North American colonies; it would also commence John Adams's familiarity to a larger reading public, in both America and Britain. But as the year opened, neither development seemed likely. In the winter and early spring Adams

remained rooted in Braintree, where he was elected a surveyor of highways in March, and Abigail prepared for the birth of their first child, also to be named Abigail, in July. John's legal practice, however, continued to expand, in both size and profitability, as well as in geographic scope through his regular travel to several county courts. In June, he made the longest and most arduous journey of his early adult life, into the wilderness of the District of Maine, to attend sessions at the Lincoln County courthouse. Spring and summer travel to Maine would become a regular part of Adams's legal practice over the next decade, but it did not alter the focus of his practice, which remained, despite his frequent attendance at widely scattered local courts, in Braintree and Boston.[57]

If rather little of moment was happening in Massachusetts in early 1765, however, this was hardly the case in London. In March, Parliament passed the Stamp Act. This crowning achievement of the Grenville ministry was designed both to raise fresh revenue in America and to complete a major reform of Britain's relationship with its colonies. The statute utterly failed to raise new funds, but it was all too successful in altering the character and prospects of the British Empire.[58]

The Stamp Act did not suddenly awaken a complacent American public. In every port city a reform of the customs service in 1763 and the Sugar Act of 1764 signaled London's intention to control colonial trade more effectively, both to secure new revenue and to force American merchants and sea captains to follow established laws and trade patterns that would most benefit the metropolis. James Otis Jr. in Boston, and New York's provincial assembly had promptly protested the new taxes. On the western frontier, the Proclamation of 1763 prohibited aggressive land developers and settlers from crossing the Appalachian ridge to infringe on Native American lands. And everywhere in America the politically alert population knew that George Grenville, the head of Britain's governing ministry, had announced plans to strengthen even further the powers of colonial customs commissioners and levy additional taxes. But if many Americans were concerned about the imperial relationship by the winter of 1765, few were truly alarmed. The Stamp Act changed everything.[59]

Enacted by King George III's signature on 22 March 1765, the Stamp Act reached Boston and other American seaports in May. At its core were two provisions. First, from 1 November 1765, every American would be required to pay taxes on a wide range of official papers, including wills, deeds, and commercial contracts, by purchasing stamped paper on which such documents must be written or printed. Newspapers, too, were taxed, as were playing cards. Nearly every literate American, and every illiterate American who had important dealings with the literate, must pay the taxman. Second, all violations of the act, like those of the Sugar Act of 1764, would be tried in Admiralty courts in which royally appointed judges rendered verdicts without the check of local juries. Both provisions were essentially unprecedented. The Stamp Act was Britain's first—

and last—internal tax levied in North America. By taxing legal and commercial activities wherever they occurred, the act had a far broader, more inescapable impact than an external tax or duty, such as the Sugar Act, that was imposed upon selected imports at the port of entry and was legally avoidable by most colonists if they were willing to live without the taxed goods. And the provision for Admiralty court trials attacked a right that Americans valued almost as much as taxation solely by their representative governments, the right of trial by jury.[60]

While Parliament was shaping the Stamp Act, and as the completed statute made its way across the Atlantic and into the American consciousness, John Adams, happily unaware of this new challenge to colonial autonomy, embarked on another intellectual adventure. In 1758 he had courageously sought the advice and support of the venerable Boston lawyer Jeremiah Gridley. Adams's rewards were immediate: Gridley's sponsorship of the unknown young attorney, and his encouraging advice on the study of civil and international law. In January 1765, Gridley proved his friendship and generosity to Adams yet again. Observing that Boston's leading attorneys were already into middle age, Gridley, now near the end of his own life, voiced his concern for the "Honour and Dignity of the Bar" in the future, and decided that of the town's rising lawyers, Adams and Samuel Fitch showed the most promise to lead the profession. To be worthy of this trust, however, they must expand their knowledge of legal history and develop their oratorical skills. To this end, Gridley proposed that they join him in a weekly Sodality to read and discuss both law and rhetoric and, on the basis of their reading, prepare essays for their colleagues' critical consideration.[61]

Adams was ecstatic. Freshly inspired by Gridley's renewed favor and relishing the opportunity to discuss abstruse legal tomes with a few men who cared about such learning, he entered into his diary the proceedings of five meetings of the Sodality in January and February, noting in detail the readings in their principal subject, the medieval law of England and Europe. Immediately following his entry for the group's last recorded session, on 21 February, he wrote out a fragmentary but often powerful essay on the tyranny that both the canon and the feudal law—the baneful forces of religion and arms that he had attacked so effectively in his unpublished "Tyrants" essay of 1763—exercised over human liberty and dignity in medieval Europe. The Sodality probably expired quietly in the spring, but the one known composition that it engendered, perhaps written at several points between late February and early May, became the kernel of John Adams's most celebrated publication before the Revolution, *A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law*.[62]

Before he sat down to compose his *Dissertation* in earnest, however, a public event echoed his zealous attack on the canon law and probably encouraged him to complete and publish his argument. On 9 May, the Reverend Jonathan Mayhew, Boston's most celebrated—and controversial—liberal divine, delivered the annual Dudleian Lecture at Harvard. He used the occasion, in perfect

accord with its benefactor's wishes, to mount a powerful attack on the tyranny of the Roman Catholic Church. In the second of his four *Dissertation* essays, Adams, without naming Mayhew (whom he greatly admired), would praise the Dudleian lectures for reminding New Englanders of that clerical oppression, under the still potent remnants of medieval England's canon law, which their Puritan ancestors had escaped by coming to the New World. Adams's first two *Dissertation* essays would not appear in print until August, but both pieces, and perhaps his third essay as well, were probably substantially completed between late May and early July, before the Stamp Act had fully aroused the public. Only Adams's last essay, which was not published until October, acknowledged the announcement of the Stamp Act in America.[63]

John Adams's *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* first appeared in four installments, all without title or signature, on 12 and 19 August, 30 September, and 21 October 1765, in the *Boston Gazette*. The immediate future of this work, however, lay in Britain, not America. The English Whig Thomas Hollis placed it in the *London Chronicle*, again in four installments, in November and December 1765, under the title "A Dissertation on the Feudal and the Canon Law," and later included it in a pamphlet entitled *The True Sentiments of America* (London, 1768), under the now familiar heading, "A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law." None of these publications attributed the work to Adams, but his authorship was known in Boston by 1768, if not earlier. Additional London printings appeared in 1773 and 1782, the latter under Adams's auspices, with the work attributed to him on the title page. But the next American publication of the *Dissertation* did not appear until 1783, in Philadelphia.[64]

A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law is one of the best-written and most powerfully argued pieces John Adams ever published, but it does not belong to the American pamphlet literature opposing the Stamp Act, to which it makes almost no reference, and to whose repeal it made no discernible contribution. It is more properly both an aggressive assertion of protonationalism and a persuasive statement of the thesis that British Americans, especially those living in New England, enjoyed the most perfect freedom of any people on earth and owed their freedom both to the courage of their Puritan ancestors and to their own wisdom in educating the entire populace. The *Dissertation* is indeed, as C. Bradley Thompson has characterized it, "an essay in political education," and the long exhortation at the center of its final essay, concluding with the call to "let every sluice of knowledge be open'd and set a flowing," is one of the finest appeals to the power of learning in American literature.[65] It was this essay that first made John Adams's literary reputation, in both England and America.

A student of the development of Adams's political thought, however, may be forgiven for paying closer attention to his first *Dissertation* essay, in which he formulates a conception of the complex relationship between liberty and power that would, over the next three decades, inform his most penetrating ideas about

the virtues and perils of republican government in America. The passage is worth presenting in full:

> Man has certainly an exalted soul! and the same principle in humane nature, that aspiring noble principle, founded in benevolence, and cherished by knowledge, I mean the love of power, which has been so often the cause of *slavery*, has, whenever freedom has existed, been the cause of *freedom*. If it is this principle, that has always prompted the princes and nobles of the earth, by every species of fraud and violence, to shake off, all the *limitations* of their power; it is the same that has always stimulated the common people to aspire at independency, and to endeavor at confining the power of the great within the limits of *equity* and *reason*.[66]

John Adams would later ponder the implications of this fundamental duality—the positive and negative potential of power and knowledge—at considerable length as he explored the role of aristocracy in republican government.

In the late spring of 1765, America's first official protests against the Stamp Act began to appear. Virginia's House of Burgesses issued Patrick Henry's celebrated resolutions against taxation without representation at the end of May, and on 8 June the Massachusetts House called on every legislature to send delegates to a congress in New York in early fall to register their united opposition to the act. The early summer was fairly quiet, but just as John Adams's first two *Dissertation* essays appeared in Boston (12 and 19 August), the town suddenly exploded in wrath against the Stamp Act and its local agents, supporters, and supposed supporters. On 14 August, protestors destroyed a small building owned by the official stamp agent, Andrew Oliver, whom they hanged in effigy. On 26 August, in one of the greatest outbursts of violence before the Revolution, a large crowd looted the home of Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson, whom it wrongly believed to have advocated the Stamp Act to officials in London.

Adams was appalled by the violence of the Boston mobs. But in a long diary entry of 15 August, he asked whether Oliver and Hutchinson, by forming a powerful family oligarchy and frustrating efforts to protest the Stamp Act in a decent manner, might have stirred up the people against them. He may also have postponed submitting his third *Dissertation* essay to the *Boston Gazette* until September and used the delay to add a strong defense of liberty of the press to his original text. By 21 October, when his last *Dissertation* essay appeared, the Stamp Act Congress meeting in New York had just issued its Declaration against the statute, and the law's enforcement date was just days away. Adams must then have found the addition of a brief condemnation of the Stamp Act unavoidable. But well before this date, he had completed a more pointed objection to the new law.[67]

In early September, Governor Francis Bernard called a special session of the Massachusetts legislature, to begin on 25 September. This afforded every town

an opportunity to inform its representatives of its sentiments on the Stamp Act. In Braintree, John Adams seized this opportunity to draft a passionate condemnation of the tax, to which he added brief criticisms of other recent imperial legislation and included a few harsh characterizations of Parliament. When placed on the town committee to draft instructions to Braintree's representative, he promptly presented his text to his colleagues. Adams's draft did become the basis for Braintree's Instructions of 24 September, but not before the committee deleted several of his more zealous passages.[68]

The final text of the instructions, however, offered a strong and succinct attack upon the Stamp Act that was particularly appropriate coming from a lawyer. The instructions did argue that the tax would be economically burdensome and could soon drain the province of hard currency. And, of course, it condemned taxation without representation. But its primary focus was not on the tax itself but on the manner of enforcing it. The Stamp Act assigned every prosecution for violating its provisions to adjudication by the juryless Admiralty courts rather than to the province's regular courts of common law. In framing Braintree's Instructions, John Adams based English liberties on two core principles, which had, he declared, been valid since the Great Charter: consent to taxation solely by popularly elected representatives and verdicts by juries selected from the people.[69]

October 1765 was a good month for John Adams, the writer. On 10 October, the *Massachusetts Gazette* published Braintree's instructions to its representative in the legislature. On 14 October, the *Boston Gazette* reprinted the instructions and published yet another comic piece by "Humphrey Ploughjogger," who, in good Yankee fashion, counseled his neighbors to meet the challenge of the Sugar and Stamp Acts by doing without—without imported West Indian rum and fine English clothes, without lawsuits requiring stamped paper, and without the lawyers who tended to such useless business. On 21 October, the *Boston Gazette* ran the final *Dissertation* essay. But Adams probably observed these publications in silence. His authorship of Braintree's Instructions was well known, at least to his neighbors, but there is no evidence that either the *Dissertation* essays or the musings of "Humphrey Ploughjogger" were yet attributed to him.[70]

By the first of November, John Adams's winter had already begun. Massachusetts's courts closed that day rather than operate with stamped paper, and on 17 December the people finally forced stamp agent Andrew Oliver to resign his post. On the following day the town of Boston chose Adams, along with James Otis Jr. and Adams's old mentor, Jeremiah Gridley, to argue before Governor Bernard and the Council that the courts should be opened and the Stamp Act disregarded. When they made their case, on 20 December, Bernard replied that, while he had no power to open the courts, the attorneys might petition the judges of each court, who could make their own decision. Lawyers and the town

officers alike were uncertain how to proceed, and both the judicial system and John Adams's practice remained frozen until the spring.[71]

But Adams, although deeply concerned about his own future and that of British America, was hardly despondent. The quiet winter gave him time for thought and reflection. He resumed keeping his diary, which he had neglected for nearly a year, and in the last two weeks of December and well into January he wrote some of his longest and most insightful entries, about himself, his colleagues, and his country. He devoted most of his first entry, on 18 December, to the impact of the Stamp Act:

> The Year 1765 has been the most remarkable Year of my Life. That enormous Engine, fabricated by the british Parliament, for battering down all the Rights and Liberties of America, I mean the Stamp Act, has raised and spread, thro the whole Continent, a Spirit that will be recorded to our Honour, with all future Generations. . . .
>
> The People, even to the lowest Ranks, have become more attentive to their Liberties, more inquisitive about them, and more determined to defend them, than they were ever before known or had occasion to be. Innumerable have been the Monuments of Wit, Humour, Sense, Learning, Spirit, Patriotism, and Heroism, erected in the several Colonies and Provinces, in the Course of this Year. Our Presses have groaned, our Pulpits have thundered, our Legislatures have resolved, our Towns have voted, The Crown Officers have every where trembled, and all their little Tools and Creatures, been afraid to Speak and ashamed to be seen.[72]

Too many of Massachusetts's leaders, however, had not been so courageous. Several men in authority were paralyzed in timidity, and his own profession was especially disappointing: "The Bar seem to me to behave like a Flock of shot Pidgeons. They seem to be stopped, the Net seems to be thrown over them, and they have scarcely Courage left to flounce and flutter." Nor could Adams shake the feeling that the interruption of the Stamp Act came at the worst possible time for his legal career, when after seven years of great effort he was finally "just getting under Sail." But the day following a quiet Christmas, John Adams rose, collected his spirits, and, before beginning another essay under a new pseudonym, wrote: "At Home by the Fireside viewing with Pleasure, the falling Snow and the Prospect of a large one."[73]

The Stamp Act crisis had not run its course by the close of 1765. The act was a failure nearly everywhere in North America, as the people in one British colony after another forced designated stamp agents to resign their posts, and unopened bundles of stamped paper were locked away or, in a few communities, destroyed by angry crowds. In October the Stamp Act Congress, a gathering of legislators from nine colonies, petitioned for the act's repeal. In England, where the Grenville ministry had fallen over unrelated issues in July, the act was highly

unpopular in the major ports and manufacturing towns, and a campaign to repeal it, favored by the new Rockingham ministry, was just beginning in Parliament. But the Stamp Act was legally in effect from November 1765 until its repeal in March 1766, and in nearly every colony most courts were closed for the winter. America had nullified the Stamp Act, but the statute had chilled commerce and frozen the judicial system nearly everywhere.[74]

American reactions to the Stamp Act since its arrival in the port cities in May 1765 had varied greatly, from one community to another, across various political institutions, and among countless individuals, in both their timing and their intensity. Several provincial legislatures, notably those of Virginia and Massachusetts, had condemned the act immediately and called on public leaders to oppose it. City and town leaders generally took longer to register their opposition, and the general populace also mobilized more slowly. But local resistance gathered strength nearly everywhere as the date of the statute's implementation approached, and from August into December street protests from Boston to St. Kitts in the West Indies forced stamp agents to renounce their offices. Many individuals, including some who became the act's fiercest opponents, had also been slow to oppose it. One of these was John Adams.

One can only guess at Adams's first reaction to the Stamp Act, or even the extent of his awareness of the law before August 1765. He wrote no extant letters from October 1764 until June 1766, and between late February and mid-December 1765 he made just one diary entry, on 15 August, in which he recorded both his disapproval of Boston's rough treatment of stamp agent Andrew Oliver and his dismay at the obstructive power of the Hutchinson-Oliver oligarchy in provincial politics. In this same period, of course, Adams wrote copiously for the press: eight different drafts and finished essays composed at some point between February and October, of which five, the four parts of his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* and the brief exhortation by "Humphrey Ploughjogger," appeared in the *Boston Gazette*. Yet of these eight pieces, only his last *Dissertation* essay and "Ploughjogger"'s latest effort discussed the Stamp Act; both appeared in October and may have been composed largely in that month.[75]

Moreover, Adams's *Dissertation* itself, in both its genesis and content, was neither an attack on the Stamp Act nor a polemic directed at any current public issue, but a declaration of New England's political and cultural superiority that belongs to the rich literature of American exceptionalism. Within that literature it is especially notable, given its lay authorship, for its aggressive assertion of the political virtues of dissenting Protestantism, its sharp attack upon the canon law of both the Anglican and the Roman Catholic churches, and its hostility toward the campaign by Anglican clergymen in America to establish an American bishop and the missionary efforts in America of the Church of England, through its Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign

Parts, which had established a chapel in the early eighteenth century in Braintree, less than a mile from Adams's home.[76]

When John Adams did finally express his views on the Stamp Act, in his draft for Braintree's Instructions to its representative in the legislature, composed in September, his opposition was determined, sweeping, and passionate, directed at all parliamentary legislation that infringed on the two most fundamental rights of British Americans: their sole power to tax themselves, and their right to trial by jury. The final version of Braintree's Instructions, however, was appropriately brief and impersonal, as Adams discovered when, contrary to his memory of the event decades later, his committee colleagues trimmed some of his assertions and rhetoric before presenting the text to the town for approval. Even in his original draft, the instructions hardly gave Adams an opportunity to discuss British policy toward America in any depth.

By the late fall of 1765, John Adams found himself facing an "enormous Engine for battering down all the Rights and Liberties of America," which he had somehow, probably because of professional and family distractions, failed to engage fully, with all his talents and energy, over the previous half year. After Governor Bernard rejected the appeal that he and his colleagues had made to open the courts, Adams found himself in uncomfortably new territory. He was convinced that American legislators, judges, and lawyers must do something to prevent the Stamp Act from shutting down British North America, but he privately admitted that he was not sure what could legally be done.[77]

5. The Clarendon Essays and the True British Constitution

At just this point, Adams discovered a fresh occasion to think and to write, to explore new ideas, first in his study, where they found copious expression in his diary, and then in print. He had not engaged in polemical exchanges in the public press since 1763, when he had criticized "J" (Jonathan Sewall) for his factional essays. In America, the Stamp Act, which had virtually no defenders in print, had not supplied the occasion for such an exchange. In the English press, however, the statute had several advocates. An essay by one of these, who wrote under the pseudonym "William Pym," was reprinted in the *Boston Evening-Post*. James Otis Jr., writing as "Hampden" in the *Boston Gazette*, immediately replied in a series of essays, and Adams saw no need to amplify Otis's argument or to enter a debate he had missed in the summer of 1765. But "William Pym," by his very name, offered Adams the opportunity to do something different, to place the current British assault on American rights in the broad context of English history. The result was a series of three remarkable essays published in January 1766, also in the *Boston Gazette*, over the historic signature, "Clarendon."[78]

In seeking to open the courts without stamps, Adams had faced a twofold problem that was fairly simple to define but maddeningly frustrating to solve.

He firmly believed that the governor and his councilors, with the support of the assembly if necessary, were the proper officials to rule that the courts must open; he saw no precedent for the judges of each court to make this ruling. But if the governor would not yield, either to open the courts or to convene the full legislature to address the problem, Adams conceded that it might be necessary to turn to the judges as a last resort. By mid-January, the few judges who were willing to open their courts without stamps had done so. The others, and the governor, remained unmoved, and the province endured its judicial deprivation until the spring.[79]

Behind this immediate issue, however, lay a more fundamental problem. What was a British subject to do when his government suddenly refused to deliver the simple justice it had supplied for nearly a century? In his appeal to Governor Bernard, Adams had cited passages from the legal treatises and opinions of Lord Chief Justice Edward Coke, Lord Chief Justice John Holt, and Thomas Wood: "The Law provides a Remedy for every Wrong"; "The Act of Law, never doth Wrong"; and "Where the construction of any Act is left to the Law, the Law will never construe it to work a wrong." Justice Holt had further declared, Adams noted, that an act of Parliament, like England's monarch, "can do no Wrong." Finally, Adams appealed to Magna Charta (the Great Charter of 1225), in which the king pledged: "We deny no Man Justice, we delay no Man Justice." Yet Parliament had in effect, if not in intent, done a wrong in passing the Stamp Act, George III had done a wrong in signing it, and Governor Bernard, as the king's personal representative in Massachusetts, had done a wrong in refusing to suspend its operation.[80]

One could not resolve this dilemma simply by repeating to the people of British North America the litany of their rights as Englishmen. The Stamp Act itself, in Adams's view, had already made "the People, even to the lowest Ranks, . . . more attentive to their Liberties, more inquisitive about them, and more determined to defend them, than they were ever before known or had occasion to be."[81] This violation of rights was the message of James Otis Jr., and he had taught it, and as "Hampden" was still teaching it, with great zeal. What these rights—no taxation without representation, and no trials without juries—needed was a larger context that could be presented under a new label. It was John Adams's conviction that America's essential rights must be firmly grounded in English history, both political and legal, under the banner of the "true British Constitution."

Adams first entered a brief essay headed "N.B. Lord Clarendon to William Pym," into his diary on 23 December 1765. Six more pieces, some much shorter and more fragmentary than the first, followed between 25 December and 11 January 1766, before a much longer, more polished essay appeared in his 18 January entry. From four of the earlier pieces, and other recent passages in his diary, Adams constructed two finished essays that appeared in the *Boston Gazette* on 13

and 20 January. His last diary draft appeared in print, revised and extended, as his last and most important "Clarendon" essay on 27 January. In respect to its content, however, his third essay differs so fundamentally from his first two that it could quite appropriately have appeared over a different signature.[82]

On 23 December, John Adams rode to Boston to seek out his legal colleagues and then accompanied his cousin Samuel Adams to "the Monday night Clubb," where he spent the evening "very agreeably" with nearly a dozen friends, "Politicians all at this Clubb." Reporting the occasion in his diary, he commented on the political behavior and beliefs of several members and sketched vivid portraits of Samuel Adams and James Otis Jr., who was also in attendance. Immediately following his account of the evening, he entered "N.B. Lord Clarendon to William Pym," his first effort as "Clarendon," into his diary. The appearance of this text at this point may have been prompted by conversing with Otis, who was just then publishing his own replies to "William Pym," over the signature "Hampden." But Adams let his initial thoughts as "Clarendon" percolate for more than two weeks. His first published essay, appearing on 13 January, contains most of the material from the first two of his diary drafts, entered on 23 and 25 December, but from no later entry. He considerably extended these first thoughts in print, however, and amplified his text with a fuller exploration of English history.[83]

It was evidently "William Pym's" doubly curious name that first drew Adams's attention to his essay. The pseudonym was presumably an erroneous homage to John Pym, the antiroyalist leader of the Long Parliament from 1640 to 1643. For whatever reason, neither Adams nor Otis ever remarked on the mistaken signature. From his first sentence, "Clarendon" focused on the historical irony of the new Pym's argument: a celebrated enemy of arbitrary government in seventeenth-century England now embracing arbitrary imperial rule in the eighteenth-century British Empire. Following a brief recital of the abuses of power by the historical Pym's opponent, King Charles I, Adams introduced Sir Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley, two judicial lieutenants of an earlier royal tyrant, Henry VII, and connected the Tudor monarchy's notorious Star Chamber with the new Admiralty courts in America. But the first Parliament under Henry VIII and the Long Parliament under Charles I each rejected arbitrary rule, and Americans, sensitive to "the real constitution of Great-Britain," followed their example by rejecting unlawful taxation and juryless courts. Had Pym lived in eighteenth-century America and retained his old spirit of the 1640s, "Clarendon" declared, he "would have torn up the foundations, and demolished the whole fabric of the government, rather than have submitted" to Britain's new imperial rule, "and would have suffered democracy, aristocracy, monarchy, anarchy, any thing or nothing to have arisen in its place."[84]

But in his diary Adams soon became acutely aware of an unresolved problem with his own pseudonym. In choosing to attack "Pym" under the banner of

"Clarendon," he had taken on the challenge of a double irony: the old royalist now opposed arbitrary power; the old antiroyalist now defended it. His "Humphrey Ploughjogger" essays of 1763 showed Adams's love of comic satire and humorous reversals of expectation, but these stratagems served "Clarendon" less well. Where his first essay had focused consistently on arbitrary rule in old England, while making a few effective comparisons to recent American grievances, notably the Vice-Admiralty courts, his second essay bogged down in extended excuses for Clarendon's seventeenth-century career. After making several statements of regret for his royalist allegiance that one could never imagine the historical Earl of Clarendon endorsing, Adams's "Clarendon" finally turned to America, where he moved in scattershot fashion from one subject to another: condemning Barbados for submitting to the Stamp Act; praising the popular resistance on St. Christopher (St. Kitts); commending the uniform nullification of the statute throughout the continental colonies and the courage of the Stamp Act Congress; echoing his tribute to the virtues of the American people in his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law*; and finishing with a passage of wondering admiration for all the Stamp Act's opponents drawn from his own diary. Along the way, he again asserted that America's resistance to the Stamp Act was founded on "the true constitution of Britain." But as he closed his second essay, "Clarendon" seemed to have lost his focus and run out of energy.[85]

At this point, Adams suddenly changed course. Abandoning his pose as "Clarendon" (but not the earl's signature), he left off rehashing the political controversies of seventeenth-century England to celebrate what he believed to be that era's greatest achievement, the British constitution. On 18 January, again under the heading "Clarendon to Pym," he began the process of composing his longest and most original essay since his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law*.

In his diary essay Adams largely ignored both "Pym" and "Clarendon" and radically shifted his focus in his first sentence: "There has been a great Inquiry, in some Parts of America, after a Diffinition of the british Constitution." Rejecting at once several common definitions as partial, descriptive, or simply laudatory, he chose first to investigate several other "constitutions"—of the human body, or of "a Machine, a Clock, a Watch, a Ship, or a Grist Mill." Here John Adams expressed some of his earliest convictions as an educated man of the Enlightenment, convictions formed during his close attention to Professor John Winthrop's lectures in natural philosophy at Harvard College and, soon thereafter, through his own reading. For Adams, both politics and the constitutions that ordered political activity, as creations of human intelligence, were integral aspects of nature. There was nothing exceptionally artificial or mechanistic about their design, because all nature was itself carefully designed. Following an explanation of the essential function of a constitution—an integrated arrangement of all constituent parts—to the life and health of the human body, and to the effective working of a clock or any effective machine, he continued:

> Let Us now enquire if the same Reasoning is not applicable to Government. For Government is a Frame, a scheme, a system, a Combination of Powers, for a certain End vizt. the good of the whole Community. . . . I shall take for granted what I am sure no Briton will controvert, that Liberty is essential to human Happiness. . . . And here lies the Difference between the british Constitution and other Constitutions of Government, vizt. that Liberty is its End—the preservation of liberty is its End, its Use, its Designation, its Drift and scope, as much as Life and Health are the Ends of the Constitution of the human Body, as much as the Mensuration of Time is the End of the Constitution of a Watch, as much as Grinding Corn is the End of a Grist Mill, or the Transportation of Burdens the End of a Ship.

Adams followed this passage with a brief exposition of the various parts of the British constitution, with their proper functions.[86]

In reshaping his draft into a finished essay, Adams began by rejecting "Pym"'s charge that the colonists were ignorant of the British constitution. In his diary draft he had instructed an inquiring—and seemingly ignorant—American public. But in the pages of the *Boston Gazette*, "Clarendon" declared: "The people of America have discovered the most accurate judgment about the real constitution," especially by their resolute opposition to the Stamp Act. Adams then proceeded to explain the larger purpose of a constitution—in the human body, in a watch, and in a body politic—much as he had in his diary. When he had reached this point in his draft, however, he had written and then struck out the sentence: "The British Constitution is therefore a Mixture." In print, he was ready to supply that mixture: "Were I to define the British constitution, therefore, I should say, it is a limited monarchy, or a mixture of the three forms of government commonly known in the schools, reserving as much of the monarchial splendor, the aristocratical independency, and the democratical freedom, as are necessary, that each of these powers may have a controul both in legislation and execution, over the other two, for the preservation of the subjects liberty."[87]

Adams then breathed into his ideal mixed government the life of the real governments that Englishmen knew, both in Britain and, with a few alterations, in British North America. He saw two grand constitutional powers: the legislative and the executive. In a limited, constitutional monarchy, the legislative power rested upon four pillars: "the King, Lords, Commons, and People." He distinguished the people from the House of Commons because they had the power of electing the Commons, upon the principle "that the meanest and lowest of the people, are, by the unalterable indefeasible laws of God and nature, as well intitled to the benefit of the air to breathe, light to see, food to eat, and clothes to wear, as the nobles or the king. All men are born equal: and the drift of the British constitution is to preserve as much of this equality, as is compatible

with the people's security against foreign invasions and domestic usurpation." This did not mean, to Adams's mind, that all the people, or even every adult free male, should vote, as we know from many of his other writings. But the voice of the people was so essential that "the constitution would be as compleat without a kingly as without a popular power," because "it is this reservation, of fundamentals, of the right of giving instructions, and of new elections, which creates a popular check, upon the whole government which alone secures the constitution from becoming an aristocracy, or a mixture of monarchy and aristocracy only."[88]

The executive power, too, depended upon the active participation of the people. Adams treated the executive in simpler terms than he had the legislative function. Although in Britain the Lords and leading members of the Commons, and in America several governor's councilors, did have important roles in administering the laws, Adams considered just two pillars of executive power. The king was the "supreme executor of the laws" and was "always present in person or by his judges, in his courts, distributing justice among the people." But because these judges, "being few," "might be easily corrupted," and "being commonly rich and great, . . . might learn to despise the common people, and forget the feelings of humanity," the constitution gave to the people, as both grand and petit jurors, the power to determine all questions of fact in all cases. Therefore, "two branches of popular power, voting for members of the house of commons, and tryals by juries," were "the heart and lungs, the main spring and the center wheel, and without them, the body must die; the watch must run down; the government must become arbitrary, and this our law books have settled to be the death of the laws and constitution."[89]

"Clarendon" concluded his praise of the British constitution by bringing its essential virtue home to its ultimate foundation: the individuals, families, and communities that it served: "What a fine reflection and consolation it is for a man . . . that he can be subjected to no laws, which he does not make himself, or constitute some of his friends to make for him: his father, brother, neighbour, friend, a man of his own rank, nearly of his own education, fortune, habits, passions, prejudices, one whose life and fortune and liberty are to be affected like those of his constituents, by the laws he shall consent to for himself and them." And turning one last time to "Pym," he asked: "[W]ho has discovered the most ignorance of the British constitution; you who are for exploding the whole system of popular power, with regard to the Americans, or they who are determined to stand by it, in both its branches, with their lives and fortunes?"[90]

John Adams's "Clarendon" letters probably made little lasting impression on the Massachusetts public; they never gained the celebrity, in America or in England, of his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law*. But they were of far greater importance in the development of Adams's political thought. For the first time in print, if only briefly, the young provincial lawyer built part of his

argument on a fairly impressive knowledge of British legal and political history after the initial settlement of New England. Over the next decade he would devote great energy to this subject and incorporate his increased historical understanding in some of his most important publications. A mastery of both ancient and recent British history would be essential as he developed another theme, which he had passed very close by in 1763 and 1765, but which he now placed front and center, the true British constitution. In his third "Clarendon" letter, he first displayed his detailed understanding of this constitution. Here, at the age of thirty, after seven years of intense study, John Adams discovered the grand theme that would inform his career as a thinker and writer, with remarkable results, both theoretical and practical, over the next quarter century.[91]

As Adams's most important constitutional writing of the 1760s, his third "Clarendon" essay deserves close attention in several respects. It begins his fascination with the intricacies of "mixed government," a concept that he identified as "known in the schools," but which was not, so far as one can determine, taught in detail in any Massachusetts school, including Harvard College. There was, however, no shortage of important literature on the subject, and over the next decade, beginning at just this time, he would engage deeply in that literature. At this early stage in his political thinking, Adams recognized just two grand divisions in the constitution, the legislative and the executive power; he incorporated the judicial power in the executive. In the 1770s he would reconsider this view and, perhaps more than any other American thinker of the Revolutionary era, he would work to establish the judiciary as a third branch of government.

In discussing the British constitution's two branches, however, Adams insisted on two points that he would champion without wavering for the rest of his life: the chief executive must exercise a role in the legislative branch, and the people must play a role in both the legislative and executive branches. Adams is well known as a conservative constitutional thinker and architect who limited the people's principal role in the legislative power, the right to vote, to fewer people than did many of his Revolutionary colleagues. But as "Clarendon" in 1766, he argued that the people must have a vital role in the legislative power because: "All men are born equal: and the drift of the British constitution is to preserve as much of this equality, as is compatible with the people's security." And in concluding his argument, he charged "William Pym," who, he implied, was a mere hireling of George Grenville, the architect of the Stamp Act, with trying to destroy "the whole system of popular power, with regard to the Americans." In this essay, John Adams declared his belief in the importance of two of the three polarities in eighteenth-century constitutional government: the chief executive and the people. The aristocracy, however, would not receive his close attention for another decade.[92]

After "Clarendon," Adams's winter probably passed quietly. From mid-January to early March he made no diary entries, wrote no extant letters, and

did no legal business. But in March, the town of Braintree came to life and chose John Adams as one of its five selectmen. He had finally become a fully recognized local leader and had some reason to believe he was now on a par, at least in the town of his birth, with the Quincys and the Thayers. Elsewhere, too, the pace of life was quickening. In early April, well before news of the Stamp Act's repeal reached America, Adams began entering legal cases in the Suffolk and Plymouth inferior courts, which were open for business. In Britain, on 19 March 1766, King George III signed both the repeal of the Stamp Act and the Declaratory Act, which asserted Parliament's right to legislative supremacy in America "in all cases whatsoever," but the news did not reach Boston until May. Soon thereafter, Adams fully resumed his legal practice. But in the late spring he suffered an unexpected political disappointment when he challenged the town's incumbent representative in the provincial assembly, Ebenezer Thayer, whom he quite disliked. Braintree reelected Thayer, and Adams privately grumbled that his neighbors had disregarded his stout opposition to the Stamp Act, when other towns had rewarded the defenders of their rights with public office. That precious role of the people's representative, praised so movingly at the end of "Clarendon's" third letter, was not yet to be his.[93]

In the winter of 1767, John Adams wrote four more newspaper entries, two slight letters by "Humphrey Ploughjogger," and two more substantial essays as "Governor Winthrop" writing to "Governor Bradford." All were in response to essays by "Philanthrop," the latest pseudonym of Adams's old friend and sparring partner, Jonathan Sewall, who was mounting a spirited defense of the increasingly unpopular Governor Francis Bernard against a host of charges. Adams last essays of the 1760s were full of his good humor and again employed material from English history, both to charge Bernard with seeking unconstitutional powers and to show that "Philanthrop" was attempting to trivialize Bernard's serious transgressions. And he made one new and important point—that "a free government" must never be regarded as "a kind of machine, calculated for perpetual motion and duration." Constitutions could survive only if their supporters understood that "the spirit of liberty is and ought to be a jealous, a watchful spirit," ready to expose the subtlest attempts to alter and subvert them.[94]

With this sage warning, John Adams completed the first stage of his evolution as a political thinker and writer. He had begun his literary career in 1760 by considering the narrowest of issues, the proliferation of noxious inns and taverns in his hometown, although even in these unpublished first attempts he had pointed to a larger political question, the integrity of provincial elections. In 1763, writing as "Humphrey Ploughjogger" and "U," he broke into print with several essays on provincial themes and directed his gaze beyond Braintree to Boston, but his view of public life still did not extend beyond the immediate concerns of his own province. In 1765, in his *Dissertation on the Canon and the*

Feudal Law, he expanded his vision to include England and Europe as he moved back to the era of New England's establishment. In 1766 and again in 1767, he was initially drawn to addressing the public by immediate political issues, but he quickly discovered the need for a distinctive new voice to broaden the scope of his argument. Both as "Clarendon" and as "Governor Winthrop," he shifted his focus to England's rich political history and to the constitutional legacy it had created for all British people, wherever they lived. For the next several years, Adams would write almost nothing for the press, but when he next took up his pen, he would ignore every local political issue that did not have the broadest immediate constitutional implications for Massachusetts, and for British North America.

6. The End of a Provincial Idyll

In March 1767, shortly after the appearance of his last letter of the year as "Governor Winthrop," John Adams was elected to a second term as a Braintree selectman. On 11 July, Abigail gave birth to her second child, whom the couple named John Quincy Adams, in honor of Abigail's aged grandfather, John Quincy, the senior member of Braintree's first family, whose life was just ending. And John Adams, while pursuing his growing legal practice, entered into his diary occasional plans for improving his farm. Suffolk County's first "country lawyer" had become a success in his professional, political, and social life without leaving his hometown or giving out any sign that he ever would.[95]

But 1767 would be Adams's last full year in Braintree until his retirement in 1801. His legal practice had become too extensive and successful, and too dependent on affluent Boston merchants, to be restricted by the time-consuming and exhausting twenty-mile commute from Braintree and back. His involvement, both professional and personal, in the activities of the Suffolk County bar was also growing. Moreover, while he took a long vacation from writing political essays for the press, an activity that he could pursue with equal facility in Braintree or in Boston, he was becoming more engaged, if somewhat reluctantly, in the politics of Boston's Patriot movement. Feeling the strain of additional travel to attend an increasing number of county courts, an activity that he felt he could not afford to curtail, he announced his decision not to stand for a third term as a Braintree selectman, and in April 1768 he brought his growing family into the city. This move, and the renewed crisis in British-American relations at just this time, signaled for John Adams the end of an era, a seemingly idyllic era of provincial prosperity and security that he probably imagined, at least as late as 1765, would continue for the whole course of his life, as it had for his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather for over a century.[96]

John Adams, of course, could hardly have thought of his life as truly idyllic at any point since about 1750, when he gave up his joyful boyish pursuits to prepare

for college. Through his midtwenties, agonized by doubts about his professional future, he worked long hours to master obscure legal tomes on a modest income. In his thirties he was far more prosperous, but worked even harder as a traveling courtroom attorney. And in his forties his workload would increase again, as one of America's most energetic public servants. Before the Stamp Act crisis, however, Adams could look forward with confidence to a rewarding future, both for himself and for the British American province that was his country. He had established himself where he wanted to live, in his hometown; he had married the woman he wanted (and probably realized a modest gain in his local social standing in the bargain); and he was rapidly earning the highest respect in his chosen profession. The province of Massachusetts Bay, which was growing more slowly than several other British North American colonies, appeared to have more modest prospects, but Adams was pleased with its increasingly secular culture and proud of its political and cultural heritage.

The Stamp Act crisis was not quite a watershed event in John Adams's life, and he does not appear to have regarded it as one. In the fall of 1765 he was deeply concerned by this challenge to America's liberties, and when the courts closed, he became alarmed for his professional future. But the resolute opposition to the new tax by many political leaders and by crowds in every port from New England to South Carolina soon reassured him that the people were alert to their rights and would defend them. By the late spring of 1766, when news of the act's repeal reached Boston, John Adams was back in the courtroom and cautiously optimistic about the prospects for both private and public felicity, and until at least 1768 he showed little uncertainty about America's future, or about his own.[97]

Some part of Adams's optimism must have risen out of what he had achieved in the past decade. After a slow, often discouraging start from 1758 to 1761, his legal practice grew rapidly, both in Suffolk County's inferior and superior courts and, beginning in 1762, in the Bristol and Plymouth county courts. By 1767 he was handling many additional cases in Barnstable and Middlesex counties and had begun making occasional but rewarding visits to Worcester and Hampshire counties to the west, and to Essex, York, and Lincoln counties to the north. His inclusion, with celebrated senior colleagues Jeremiah Gridley and James Otis Jr., in Boston's delegation to argue for the opening of the courts before Governor Bernard in December 1765 confirmed his growing importance in Massachusetts's legal profession, and his regular appearance as defense counsel in the province's Vice-Admiralty court in 1768 placed him at the center of Boston's commercial, and patriotic, circles.[98]

Adams's growth as a scholar was somewhat slower, but he openly declared his aspiration to a broad legal knowledge in October 1758, his first month as a practicing lawyer. His steady acquisition of that knowledge was evident in several of his surviving pleadings by the mid-1760s and would be on full display

both in his defense of the British soldiers in the Boston Massacre trials in 1770 and in the public papers and published essays he would produce from 1773 to 1776. His mastery of political philosophy was delayed by his legal studies and was still at an early stage when he moved from Braintree to Boston in 1768. But tantalizing hints in his diary as early as 1755 suggest that he was determined from the outset to develop a broad knowledge of political history and theory, and by the early 1770s his attention to political authors became highly focused and productive. He had, in Daniel Coquillette's memorable phrase, become a "Justinian in Braintree" before leaving his hometown for Boston.[99] Thereafter he would aspire to become his province's leading constitutional authority, in the tradition of Locke, Sidney, and Harrington, and of Machiavelli and Aristotle.

It is as a profound political thinker and fluent, persuasive writer, however, that John Adams's rapid development in the 1760s is most impressive. From 1763 to 1767, he drafted some three-dozen political essays or fragments of essays, from which he published eighteen finished pieces (counting his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* as four essays). Nearly every published piece, as well as an occasional item left in draft form, is worthy of the critical analysis (and substantial quotation) provided in this chapter. But three essays stand out for their literary and intellectual qualities: his unpublished "All Men would be Tyrants if they could" (1763), for its realistic assessment of the necessity of government to control the human passions; his fourth *Dissertation* essay (1765), on the political power of knowledge; and his third "Clarendon" essay (1766), which offered one of the finest brief explications of the British constitution by any American writer before the Revolution. The young author of such a body of work could well feel confident in his abilities to meet the challenges of the future.

But in 1765 John Adams believed he had an even sturdier foundation for his political optimism than his own abilities: the British constitution. This massive amalgam of common law precedents, parliamentary statutes, and royal decrees, dating back at least to Magna Carta, guaranteed to every freeman in British North America a body of rights that no British government could justly reduce or retract. This constitution was, Adams believed, mankind's finest political achievement, and any person who attempted to alter or diminish it could have only the basest of motives. The repeal of the Stamp Act perhaps signaled that the British Parliament understood this, yet both its passage of the Declaratory Act, which King George III signed on the same day that he approved the repeal of the tax, and the spirited defense of the Stamp Act by several writers in the British press left many Americans uneasy.

It was this uncertainty that impelled Adams to seize on the concept of "the true" or "real" British constitution. His third "Clarendon" letter (January 1766) was designed to show Americans what the true British constitution really was and to assure them that a proper division between the executive and legislative

powers, with an effective role assigned to the people in the exercise of each of these powers, would always protect them from arbitrary power. If John Adams's political faith proved justified, Americans could remain happy provincials, secure in the knowledge that the British constitution would be their shield against every momentary exercise of arbitrary power by corrupt politicians and officials, whether in London or in America. In the summer of 1767, this reverence for the true British constitution was still unbroken, in Braintree and throughout North America.

II

The Discovery of the Republic

1768–1772

> No Man has yet produced any Revelation from Heaven in his favour, any divine Communication to govern his fellow Men. Nature throws us all into the World equall and alike. . . . The Author of Nature has left it wholly in the Choice of the People, to make what mutual Covenants, to erect what Kind of Governments, and to exalt what Persons they please to power and dignities, for their own Ease, Convenience, and Happiness.
>
> *An Oration on Government at Braintree, 1772*

In the half-dozen years before American Independence, John Adams and thousands of his countrymen in British North America first encountered Europe's venerable republican tradition as a body of political knowledge of compelling relevance for their own day. Technically, this was more of a rediscovery than a discovery; republican ideas had been sitting in open books right in front of generations of educated colonials who studied the Greek and Latin classics, and they were hardly unknown to those among their less learned neighbors who had ever heard anything about the contentious politics of seventeenth-century England. Only in the 1770s, however, did Americans begin to imagine that a republican form of government might offer a solution to their frustrated attempts to defend their popular rights within an empire that still centered on a distant but powerful monarchy and aristocracy.

This rediscovery was part of a broad transatlantic intellectual and political mobilization that occurred within just a few decades in late eighteenth-century Switzerland and Holland, in British North America, and finally in France, which together comprised the Western political tradition's third major encounter with the republican idea.[1] The first encounter, mixing discovery with real invention in the organizing of human communities, occurred many times, with considerable variety of detail, in several of the city-states of ancient Greece and in early Rome. The second encounter led to the formulation of the classical

republican tradition in northern Italy during the Renaissance and its spread to Switzerland, Holland, and England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[2] By the mid-eighteenth century, nearly every major political and legal thinker, whether he lived in one of Europe's small republics, in a German principality, in the constitutional monarchy of Great Britain, or in more nearly autocratic France, had incorporated republican language and many republican concepts into fresh discussions of the rights of individuals and the nature of just governments.

Not all Americans, however, engaged the republican tradition in the same way or viewed alike that tradition's essential nature and its proper application to the political dilemma they faced in the 1770s. Of the relatively few articulate British North Americans whose embrace of republicanism can be reconstructed with any confidence, John Adams was distinctive in two ways. He was one of the first Americans, if not the very first, to seize on the republican idea as a current, vital reality; and he may have been the only republican in America who came to believe that the constitution of Great Britain was in its essence republican. This first distinction, his priority as an advocate of republican thought before the steady collapse of British authority following the Boston Tea Party, appears closely bound up in Massachusetts's own distinction as the first American province to feel the full weight of Britain's arbitrary rule and is a principal subject of the present chapter. His second distinction, his unique ability to square republicanism with constitutional monarchy, both before and after Independence, was evidently shaped by more individual and elusive factors and will be an increasingly important theme in several subsequent chapters.

1. The Imperial Crisis in America, 1768–1770

From 1763 to 1765, the American colonies were suddenly confronted with a new British government that was determined to exert greater control over their economic and political life through stronger trade laws, a stricter supervision of their western frontier, and a host of new taxes levied by a Parliament in which they had no voice. Their resistance to the last of these measures, the Stamp Act, was immediate and resolute at every level: through the intimidation of stamp agents by angry crowds; the defiant declarations of cities, towns, and provincial legislatures; and the first intercolonial meeting of delegates, the Stamp Act Congress (October 1765), since the Albany Congress of 1754. Historians have commonly designated this cluster of events the Stamp Act crisis. In affixing this label, they stressed the novelty of this imperial challenge to colonial autonomy—by far the strongest since England's abortive assertion of greater control over the colonies in the decade prior to the Glorious Revolution of 1688–89.[3]

The crisis of 1768–70, however, although less often called a crisis, was more profound than that of 1763–65. In the earlier series of events, the novelty of the imperial challenge was indeed shocking, and America's ideological rejection of

all taxation without representation was less thoroughly worked out than it would be in 1768. But in 1765 there was little disagreement, either among colonial leaders or the populace, over whether they should vigorously resist the Stamp Act, and little thought that their resistance might fail to achieve its objective. Their almost unconscious unanimity in opposition, by all legal and some illegal means, ensured the prompt repeal of the statue in March 1766 by Parliament as unenforceable.

The year 1768 was different in several ways. While the colonists quickly endorsed a clearer statement of their principled opposition to all imperial taxation, most forcefully expressed in John Dickinson's widely read *Letters of a Pennsylvania Farmer*, their decision to resist the new taxes and the development of an effective means to do so were more problematical. The new Townshend Act duties of 1767, unlike the Stamp Act tax, were not sufficiently burdensome to demand quite so resolute a response. The colonists could either pay these "external" taxes without great economic distress; boycott just the taxed items—paper, glass, white and red lead, painter's colors, and tea—while relying on a combination of local manufactures and smuggled Dutch imports; or simply do without. But because there were no stamp agents to intimidate and no stamped paper to impound in 1768, a more politically effective opposition to the duties would require a boycott so extensive—of all British imports—that it would call for a substantial sacrifice by most colonists and a far greater one by import merchants and the whole populations of port cities. Such an effort, America's first nonimportation movement, could succeed only if the major ports acted in harmony. In 1768 British North America's three largest ports—Boston, New York, and Philadelphia—began fairly well-coordinated boycotts without any clear idea of how long they would have to sustain them to force Britain to repeal the Townshend duties.[4]

But in Boston mounting tensions between the maritime population and British trade officials soon threatened public order. In 1768 crowd action against the port's customs agents prompted Governor Francis Bernard to call for two regiments of British troops, about six hundred men, to keep order. From their landing in early October, Boston was an occupied city. The port's hostility to the troops eventually proved more deadly than its anger at the customs men, and on 5 March 1770 townsmen and troops clashed in the Boston Massacre. Having reached its peak, the fury of the crisis soon began to subside. Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson immediately agreed to the popular demand to withdraw the troops from Boston, and the House of Commons, following a climactic debate on the day of the massacre, agreed to repeal all the Townshend duties except that on tea. Although they remained unhappy with the tea tax, the major port cities—first New York, then Philadelphia, and finally Boston—amid much mutual recrimination, raggedly ended nonimportation in the summer and fall.[5]

In Britain, too, the late 1760s was a time of political uncertainty. The leadership in Parliament was as unstable as it had been at any time in the eighteenth century, with the rise and fall of the Grenville ministry (1763–65), followed in quick succession by the ministries of the Marquis of Rockingham, the Earl of Chatham (William Pitt the Elder) and Charles Townshend, and finally the Duke of Grafton, before the accession of a more durable leader, Frederick, Lord North (1770–82). This instability had several causes, domestic as well as imperial, but the challenge of dealing with a recalcitrant America both compounded Britain's administrative difficulties and fed factional antagonisms. A frustrated Parliament was twice compelled to back off from enforcing its imperial will: in March 1766, when it repealed the Stamp Act, but on the same day, in its Declaratory Act, asserted its authority to pass any act or tax for America; and in March 1770, when it repealed most of the Townshend duties, but again clung to its authority by retaining the tax on tea.[6]

By the fall of 1770 many leaders on both sides of the Atlantic feared they were losing their ability to shape the imperial relationship to their liking, but it was quite unclear where events were heading. America could—and for three years did—live with the tea tax, often by smuggling in Dutch tea, but other political and economic disagreements between Britain and America kept at least five colonies—Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Virginia, and South Carolina—on edge during this supposed "quiet period" (1771–73), in addition to more local conflicts, often with imperial implications, that troubled Maryland, North Carolina, and Georgia. For their part, most British leaders were able to ignore the irritating Americans during this brief interlude, if only by honoring Lord North's pledge, in March 1770, not to seek new revenue in America. But the Townshend Act crisis had left a new feeling of anxiety in Britain and America, and especially in Boston. Perhaps no resident of the town felt this more keenly than John Adams.[7]

2. John Adams as a Boston Patriot

For the greater part of his early adult life, following his years at Harvard and in Worcester, John Adams resided in Braintree, the town of his birth. But for two brief, dramatic periods, from 1768 to 1771, and again from 1772 to 1774, he lived with his growing family in Boston. Almost from the day of his first arrival, he was an active citizen of the town and an active Patriot, drafting official declarations and instructions for Boston's town meetings and composing formal letters for Boston's Sons of Liberty. In 1770 he became even more deeply immersed in the contentious life of America's most rebellious city, both as lead defense counsel for the Boston Massacre soldiers and as a representative of Boston in the provincial legislature. In April 1771, exhausted in body and spirit, he moved his family back to Braintree, and in May, for the first time in his life, he took a vacation.

Adams moved to Boston in April 1768 in part because, after a decade of persistent and profound legal study, regular travel to county courthouses as far north as Maine, and steady application to his practice, he had become so successful as a "country lawyer," his goal when he began his practice in 1758, that he was one of the busiest attorneys in Massachusetts. Moving to the center of Boston might entail abandoning his country image, but without the need for an eleven-mile commute by horseback from Braintree, often returning home on the same day, he could address his mounting caseload more easily, attend several important courts just a short walk from his door, and be close at hand to some of his most affluent clients, Boston's merchants. Thus began one of the most prosperous periods of John Adams's professional life. It would also be a time of greater involvement in the Patriot movement and more expansive intellectual growth than the thirty-two-year-old country lawyer had ever known. When he moved to Boston in 1768, Adams was an up-and-coming young attorney and political author. When he returned to Braintree in 1771, this defender of the British soldiers was one of the most widely known men in Massachusetts, and one of the more troubled.[8]

John Adams's first stay in Boston opened with a seemingly unexceptional event, the appearance of a brief newspaper essay. On 23 May 1768 the *Boston Gazette* ran a piece signed "Sui Juris." Although it was pseudonymous, its explicit reference to *A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* and the private statement of a contemporary make Adams's authorship quite certain. "Sui Juris" promised to develop his theme, the danger to American liberties posed by the clerical campaign for an Anglican bishop in America, in subsequent essays. In the following months, however, no sequel appeared, nor did Adams, who had written steadily for the press from 1763 to 1767, publish another political essay until 1773.[9]

How can one explain this silence? The colonies' struggle with Britain was not on holiday. Boston saw repeated demonstrations against customs men and Tory printers, beginning with the seizure of John Hancock's ship, *Liberty*, by customs agents in June 1768, and the city's merchants began their nonimportation boycott in August. In response to Governor Bernard's request to London, British troops entrusted with protecting Boston's customs officers landed at Long Wharf on 1 October. At the provincial level, the Massachusetts House of Representatives' February 1768 circular letter to every legislature in British North America, protesting Parliament's new assaults on colonial liberties, became a celebrated manifesto when Bernard, under direct orders from Britain's secretary of state, Lord Hillsborough, demanded that the House repeal it. In June 1768 the chamber refused, and that summer Patriot leaders celebrated their legislators' defiance with a dizzying number of toasts at patriotic banquets and commemorated the event in the engraving on a splendid silver punch bowl made by the local Patriot artisan, Paul Revere.[10] The near silence of John Adams's pen

during the Townshend Act crisis, and several passages in his diary and reminiscences in his autobiography, reveal unmistakably his deep ambivalence toward the patriotic cause as it began to make heavier demands on its supporters.

Outside the columns of the Boston press, however, Adams showed a strong commitment to America's liberties. In his autobiography, written nearly forty years later, he remembers the reason he moved to Boston: "My Friends [there] were very urgent with me to remove into Town."[11] His subsequent actions suggest that many of these friends were political rather than professional. In June 1768, just as he left off writing newspaper essays, Adams turned his pen to a more collective effort, drafting in committee a set of instructions from Boston's town meeting to its representatives in the provincial legislature. Assorted instructions, petitions, and reports for Boston's town meeting, and letters for the city's Sons of Liberty, all products of committees on which Adams served, followed over the next two years.[12]

As a Patriot writer, John Adams may have, for a time, lost some measure of satisfaction in authorship by turning from solo essays to group declarations, but he gained in visibility. His essays had all been anonymous or pseudonymous, at least at their first appearance in the Boston press, but he signed every text that he drafted, in whole or in part, for the town of Boston and the Sons of Liberty. Because his committee colleagues signed as well, he became identified, for the first time, with Boston's Patriot movement.[13] And in the fall of 1768, when his closest conservative friend, Jonathan Sewall, speaking informally for Governor Bernard, privately offered him a position that Sewall himself intended to vacate, that of advocate general of Boston's Vice-Admiralty court, Adams emphatically rejected this attempt by an increasingly unpopular administration to win new friends.[14] From 1768 on, John Adams would be closely connected in the public mind with Samuel Adams, Dr. Joseph Warren, and another half-dozen leading figures of Massachusetts's radical politics.

3. Adams in His Study

At a more private level, however, in a quiet voice addressed only to his diary (and perhaps to his wife), John Adams admitted to fundamental doubts about his career, his politics, and his moral character. In his autobiography he remembered his reluctance in the spring of 1768 to accept Dr. Warren's request that he attend Boston town meetings and asserted that he strongly resisted speaking there.[15] But it is his diary, in an isolated entry for 30 January 1768, less than three months before he moved with his family to Boston, that offers the most arresting view of his inner moral landscape, a view that he probably never intended to share with another soul:

> To what Object, are my Views directed? What is the End and Purpose of my Studies, Journeys, Labours of all Kinds of Body and Mind, of Tongue and

> Pen? Am I grasping at Money, or Scheming for Power? Am I planning the Illustration of my Family or the Welfare of my Country? These are great Questions. In Truth, I am tossed about so much, from Post to Pillar, that I have not Leisure and Tranquillity enough, to consider distinctly my own Views, Objects, and Feelings.—I am mostly intent at present, upon collecting a Library, and I find, that a great deal of Thought, and Care, as well as Money, are necessary to assemble an ample and well chosen Assortment of Books.—But when this is done, it is only a means, an Instrument. When ever I shall have compleated my Library, my End shall not be answered. Fame, Fortune, Power say some, are the Ends intended by a Library. The Service of God, Country, Clients, Fellow Men, say others. Which of these is nearest my Heart?

At this point, without a pause, Adams closes with a fairly accurate but unmarked quotation from Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*: "Self Love but serves the virtuous Mind to wake as the small Pebble stirs the Peaceful Lake, The Center Moved, a Circle straight succeeds, another still and still another spreads. Friend, Parent, Neighbor, first it does embrace, our Country next and next all human Race."[16]

John Adams would not irrevocably answer the political questions that he poses here for several years, even while deeply engaged in patriotic activity, but would ponder them in private until he committed himself unreservedly to public service by accepting his appointment to the First Continental Congress in 1774. His answers to his personal moral questions would, as with any good latter-day Puritan, be in progress until his death. But in the midst of these concerns of a lifetime, Adams is clear on one immediate point—the need for a good library. However he might decide any question, whatever obligation he might take on, he must have "an ample and well chosen Assortment of Books" to achieve anything.

In the field of law Adams had felt this need for a decade, following his early decision, unusual among British North American lawyers, to become thoroughly familiar with continental as well as common law, and he had been steadily acquiring a wide variety of legal tomes.[17] In politics, however, his awareness of what he needed to know grew more slowly; in 1768 he was still in the early stages of purchasing select volumes by a small handful of political philosophers that he would use so effectively in the 1770s. In college he evidently read nothing about political theory or practice and was not expected to do so. When he did begin, in Worcester, he turned first to the popular and almost current author, Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, who appealed to a broader sense of ethical conduct within a political system, Britain's constitutional monarchy, which he thoroughly accepted.[18] Young John Adams also accepted that political system and expressed his satisfaction with it in everything he wrote into the mid-1760s.

When still in his midtwenties, Adams also showed some awareness of earlier, more probing political writers, especially John Locke and even, in a stray 1760 diary entry, the great Florentine theorist Niccolò Machiavelli. But his early references to Locke were to the philosopher's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, not to his *Treatises on Government*. Adams took his initial step into a larger political world no later than 1766, when he inscribed his name in what was probably his first "republican" volume, Algernon Sidney's *Discourses Concerning Government*, a work he may have first read some years before.[19] The edition of Sidney's *Discourses* in Adams's library was published in Edinburgh in 1750, and he may have purchased it somewhat earlier than 1766, as he lists Sidney, with Locke and six other celebrated figures, as eminent seventeenth-century English statesmen in the concluding paragraph of his 1765 *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law*. But he makes no other reference to this author before 1769, when on 23 December he notes he is at his "office reading Sidney."[20]

It is not certain, however, that Adams, even then, was reading much else beyond the broad selection of legal works of which he was acquiring an unrivaled mastery. In January 1759 he first makes a fleeting mention of Montesquieu in his diary and follows this, a few months later, with a criticism of the Baron's view of the state of nature; in June 1760 he turns again to his diary to record his intention to read *The Spirit of the Laws* "thro, in order and with Attention"; and in August 1763, writing as "U" in the *Boston Gazette*, he takes issue with Montesquieu's view of civil-military relations, his first reference in print to any political philosopher. But Montesquieu, who would never become Adams's principal political inspiration, occupies an uncharacteristically prominent place in his thought in the early 1760s. During the Stamp Act crisis, Adams had mentioned John Locke and briefly quoted Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law*, but he did not refer to either writer again until the 1770s. In 1770, during the Boston Massacre trials, he would quote both Count Cesare Beccaria and Algernon Sidney, but Beccaria would not appear again in Adams's diary until the 1780s, and Sidney, aside from a passing reference in 1772, would stay out of sight until 1775. And if his diary and correspondence are any guide, the core of John Adams's republican reading, the works of James Harrington and Niccolò Machiavelli, still lay several years in his future.[21]

In fact, however, much as we would like to peer over John Adams's shoulder in either his Braintree or his Boston office, we cannot know when he began reading most of the political authors whom he would eventually discuss or quote in his published essays. His diary, especially from 1762 to late 1765, and again from 1767 through 1770, is quite irregular, and several major writers whose thoughts would fill the pages of his most important work in 1775 and 1776 make little or no appearance in his daily journal before Lexington and Concord. His correspondence, too, is quite sparse in the 1760s and early 1770s and does not

become full, in the number, length, and quality of his letters, until 1774. And he never kept a literary commonplace book.[22] His library was growing, but it remained overwhelmingly legal in character until the Revolution, and in any event Adams inscribed just a few of his volumes with his signature and entered a date of acquisition in even fewer. From the little that we can see, however, Adams was only beginning, in 1770, to sense that the history of political republics was a vital subject of surprising relevance to his own day, rather than a mere antiquarian indulgence.

4. The Boston Massacre Trials

In the early evening of 5 March 1770, near the end of a hard winter of mounting popular anger at the British troops occupying the town, a crowd of Bostonians gathered in King Street, just below the Town House (Massachusetts's regular seat of government), and began harassing a British soldier who stood on guard duty in front of the nearby Customs House. Captain Thomas Preston, an officer of the 29th Regiment of Foot, whose company was quartered nearby, heard and saw the crowd and, concerned that the sentry's very life might be in danger, marched a detachment of seven soldiers to protect and relieve him. The crowd continued to grow and become angrier, pressing close around the relief force; the soldiers lowered their bayoneted muskets to face the crowd, a club was hurled at a soldier, shots were fired, and five townsmen fell to the pavement, dead or mortally wounded. Preston then ordered his soldiers to cease firing and, after a short pause, to march back up the street away from the crowd, which was rapidly breaking up. For the rest of the evening the town remained tense, with the soldiers mostly kept in their quarters, and townsmen gathering in small clusters, talking, and then dispersing. The following day, Governor Thomas Hutchinson agreed to the demand of Boston's leaders to remove the troops from the town to Castle William, in Boston Harbor.[23]

This is a fairly bare bones summary of a complex event that has been portrayed, recounted, assessed, and reassessed from sharply opposing perspectives for more than two centuries. The Boston Massacre quickly came to occupy a commanding presence in early American history, and in American mythology, and has been enlisted in the service of contending political agendas from the moment of its occurrence. It had an immediate and profound impact upon the Patriot movement in Boston and the future course of Anglo-American relations. The "Massacre," as local Patriot leaders immediately labeled the event, also had a profound effect upon one citizen of Boston who was neither a participant in the crowd nor a witness, but immediately found himself caught up in its aftermath, with his life and career forever altered. His own words, recording an old but vivid memory, best tell his story.

Writing in his autobiography some thirty-five years after the event, John Adams placed himself, on the evening of 5 March, at a friend's house some

distance from King Street, when he heard the town's alarm bells. Upon going out into the street, he learned that "British soldiers had fired on the Inhabitants." After walking to King Street to view the scene, which had then become quiet, he went home, passing a large detachment of soldiers. The next morning he was sitting in his law office, not far from King Street, when a Mr. Forrest came in. "With tears streaming from his Eyes, he said I am come with a very solemn Message from a very unfortunate Man, Captain Preston in Prison. He wishes for Council, and can get none. I have waited on Mr. Quincy, who says he will engage if you will give him your Assistance: without it possitively he will not. Even Mr. Auchmuty declines unless you will engage. . . . I had no hesitation in answering that Council ought to be the very last thing that an accused Person should want [i.e., need] in a free Country."[24]

Some scholars have seen this reminiscence as overly romanticized, both partial and inaccurate, and in his autobiography Adams did sometimes simplify, exaggerate, and misremember events, whether due to the simple wounds of time upon memory, to a determination to achieve a stronger literary effect, or to gratify his vanity.[25] The foremost authority on the Massacre trials has argued that Adams's remembrance covered over a carefully worked out plan by Boston's radical leaders who, confident that the soldiers would be convicted of murder by any Boston jury, were nevertheless sensitive to the town's image as a just and lawful community and determined to secure the best possible legal team for their defense.[26]

It is not clear, however, that the radical leadership was ever committed to convicting the soldiers in a court of law, even as they worked tirelessly to see that they were convicted in the court of public opinion.[27] And there is no substantive evidence to challenge Adams's idealistic account of his decision to join Josiah Quincy Jr. and Robert Auchmuty in the defense of Captain Preston. A definitive judgment on this question is, in any event, quite beside the point when tracing the development of John Adams's political ideas and convictions. What matters is that in March 1770 he did agree to defend both Captain Preston and the eight enlisted British soldiers against the charge of murder in the Boston Massacre; in the fall he did defend them, using all his legal skill and knowledge; and in his summation to the jury in the trial of the soldiers he showed, for the first time in public, his new interest in England's republican tradition.

So explosive was the potential impact of the Massacre trials on public opinion and behavior in the hyperpoliticized town of Boston that the government and the court decided to defer them to the fall. This gave Adams ample time to prepare an effective defense and, in a June 1770 by-election, to take on, apparently unwillingly, a new political role, as a provincial legislator. In 1766 he had unsuccessfully sought to enter the assembly from Braintree, but in that year his legal business was less taxing, and he would be representing the people of his birthplace, where he had been carefully building up a political following.

Boston was a very different political community, one that he was still getting to know after two years' residence. But in 1770 the town's radical leadership, whatever role it may have played in either favoring or opposing his defense of the soldiers, probably did extend its support to his unsought candidacy. John Adams had been a good committee soldier in the radical cause since his arrival in Boston in 1768, and his visit to a friend's house on 5 March, the evening of the Massacre, was not a social call but a meeting of a "Clubb" of political friends. When Boston's representative James Bowdoin, elected to the Council, had to resign his seat in the House, the town was ready to choose John Adams in his place.[28]

Through the summer Adams's legislative duties were more irritating than onerous because the House was locked in a battle with Governor Hutchinson over the location of the legislature and refused to proceed to most other business. In June, in July, and again in September, John Adams voted with the majority to bring the House from Cambridge, to which Governor Bernard had moved it in 1769, back to Boston. In October, the House finally agreed to consider other business, without yielding in its determination to return to Boston, and in October and November, the legislators placed Adams on several committees. This new responsibility came at an awkward time, just as first Captain Preston's case (in October) and then the enlisted soldiers' case (in November) were finally coming to trial, and on at least one occasion Adams was excused from serving on a legislative committee. This double burden in the fall of 1770, with the need to shuttle back and forth from law office and courtroom in Boston to House sessions in Cambridge, sometimes on a daily basis, contributed to the state of complete exhaustion that Adams experienced in the winter of 1770–71.[29]

The trial of Captain Preston for murder in the Boston Massacre (*Rex vs. Preston*) opened in Suffolk County Superior Court before the full panel of the province's high justices on 24 October. Adams's old friend and rival, Attorney General Jonathan Sewall, who was offended that a British officer performing his duty would even be tried on such a charge, deliberately avoided the whole affair, leaving Samuel Quincy and Robert Treat Paine to conduct the prosecution. Adams, Josiah Quincy Jr. (Samuel's younger brother), and Robert Auchmuty were the defense counsels. The court quickly impaneled a jury that contained several men who were decidedly sympathetic to the defendant. The central question was whether Preston had ever ordered the soldiers to fire on the crowd in King Street. There was no compelling evidence that he had, and even some of the town's radical leaders doubted his guilt. Extant defense counsel notes show that Adams was well armed with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century common law precedents and statutory law, and the defense appears to have dominated the proceedings from the outset. But the trial was long by colonial standards, with full testimony by prosecution and defense witnesses, before a verdict of not guilty was returned on 30 October. Unfortunately, no record of the arguments employed by Adams, or by other counsel, survives.[30]

The trial of the eight enlisted soldiers for murder in the Boston Massacre (*Rex vs. Wemms et al.*), which opened in Suffolk Superior Court on 27 November, was quite a different matter. Five Bostonians had been killed or mortally wounded on 5 March by gunfire from British army muskets, and the acquittal of all eight soldiers would be difficult in a court of law and impossible in the court of Boston public opinion. But John Adams, again ably assisted by Josiah Quincy Jr., only had to prevail in the first venue. The records of this trial, which was even longer than *Rex vs. Preston*, are much fuller, with generous excerpts from the extensive examination of witnesses, substantial notes of counsel, and texts of the arguments and summations presented by prosecutor Paine and by Adams and Josiah Quincy. Adams hoped to secure the acquittal of all eight defendants, but despite the difficulty of connecting particular soldiers with particular victims, the jury was finally satisfied that fire from two of the eight regulars had hit and killed civilians, and on 5 December they returned convictions of manslaughter against them. In response to this, the lightest possible guilty verdict, however, the two convicted soldiers were allowed to plead the ancient right of benefit of clergy and were branded on the thumb before being released.[31]

The verdict was both a great legal victory for Adams and Quincy and an acceptable but hardly gratifying outcome for the people of Boston, who felt vindicated by the manslaughter convictions but remained firm in their belief that true justice had not been done. Both Governor Hutchinson and the British ministry accepted the outcome as the best they could have expected. John Adams, though pleased with the verdict, was distressed that Privates Kilroy and Montgomery had to undergo their branding in court and was thoroughly exhausted by the ordeal. What he felt most, however, was a pride in his legal achievement and his moral worth. Looking back on the trials in March 1773, he wrote in his diary: "The Part I took in Defence of Captn. Preston and the Soldiers, procured me Anxiety, and Obloquy enough. It was, however, one of the most gallant, generous, manly and disinterested Actions of my whole Life, and one of the best Pieces of Service I ever rendered my Country. Judgment of Death against those Soldiers would have been as foul a Stain upon this Country as the Executions of the Quakers or Witches, anciently. As the Evidence was, the Verdict of the Jury was exactly right."[32]

But John Adams's most revealing expression of his political and moral beliefs appears in his summation to the jury. His argument was evidently the longest offered by either prosecution or defense in this long trial; he began his delivery on 3 December and concluded the following day. The text runs to more than thirty printed pages, and because it was printed, evidently with his permission and cooperation, in a contemporary pamphlet of the trial's proceedings, it can quite properly be regarded as a piece of the author's published work. More to the point, it is Adams's only extant public piece of any length composed in the four years between his brief "Sui Juris" essay in the *Boston Gazette* in May 1768

and the rough notes for his oration at Braintree in the spring of 1772, and his first extended publication to appear since his "Governor Winthrop" essays of early 1767.[33]

In its general form, Adams's summation was hardly remarkable. He devoted a long first section to the law that defined both the felonies that might apply to the British soldiers, murder and manslaughter, as well as justifiable homicide by reason of self-defense, and then another felony that might reasonably apply to the crowd of civilians in King Street—participation in an unlawful riot—which could substantially affect the legal guilt or innocence of the soldiers. The precedents that constituted the core of this body of law originated in verdicts delivered in England's highest courts, supplemented by the most authoritative legal commentary, from the fifteenth to the early eighteenth centuries, and Adams reviewed it all. He followed this presentation of the law with an extensive rehearsal of the facts of the case, selected from five days of testimony in this, the longest trial in the history of provincial Massachusetts.[34] But he introduced his whole summation with a remarkable passage from the recent work of a celebrated European legal reformer and concluded with an equally arresting passage drawn not from a British jurist, but from one of England's radical political martyrs. Each quotation, and a third passage of his own composition that appears almost as an aside in the middle of his argument, reveals something of the direction of Adams's ideas as he entered the 1770s.

Adams opened in a grand manner, setting his argument firmly in a contemporary, international view of criminal justice by quoting from Count Cesare Beccaria's *Essay on Crimes and Punishments*, a work first published in English that year. "*May it please your Honours and you Gentlemen of the Jury*, I am for the prisoners at the bar, and shall apologize for it only in the words of the Marquis *Beccaria*: 'If I can but be the instrument of preserving one life, his blessing and tears of transport, shall be a sufficient consolation to me, for the contempt of all mankind.'"[35] This appeal was designed to blunt the town's rage against the British soldiers by placing the trial in its broadest legal context, to draw the jury's thoughts away from the local issue of revenge and direct them to the timeless, global question of justice, tempered by mercy.

Next, in the midst of his explication of the legal precedents governing the case, Adams found a way to soften his harsh portrait of the citizens of Boston and excuse the tumultuous behavior of the crowd in King Street, which he needed to characterize as a riotous assembly in order to defend the soldiers, by indicting the imperial rule of the British government in the broadest theoretical and historical terms:

> [I]t is a general, if not universal truth, that the aptitude of the people to mutinies, seditions, tumults and insurrections, is in direct proportion to the despotism of the government. In governments completely despotic, i.e. where the

> will of one man, is the only law, this disposition is most prevalent.—In Aristocracies, next—in mixed Monarchies, less than either of the former—in compleat Republick's the least of all—and under the same form of government as in a limited monarchy, for example, the virtue and wisdom of the administration, may generally be measured by the peace and order, that are seen among the people.[36]

The fault in King Street, Adams implied, lay not with his clients, the eight British regulars, nor with the assembled townsmen, no matter how disorderly they might have been, but with the province's recent and current executive administrators, Governors Bernard and Hutchinson, and with their imperial masters in Westminster.

When he came to his extended recounting of the facts of the case, he was again able to draw a pointed lesson: "Facts are stubborn things," which would not yield to "our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions." He then returned to the law for his peroration and made a bold appeal to an unexpected and, unlike Count Beccaria, an unfashionable authority:

> The law, in all vicissitudes of government, fluctuations of the passions, or flights of enthusiasm, will preserve a steady undeviating course; it will not bend to the uncertain wishes, imaginations, and wanton tempers of men. To use the words of a great and worthy man, a patriot, and an hero, and enlightned friend of mankind, and a martyr to liberty; I mean ALGERNON SIDNEY, who from his earliest infancy sought a tranquil retirement under the shadow of the tree of liberty, with his tongue, his pen, and his sword, "The law, (says he,) no passion can disturb. 'Tis void of desire and fear, lust and anger. 'Tis *mens sine affectu*; written reason; retaining some measure of the divine perfection. It does not enjoin that which pleases a weak, frail man, but without any regard to persons, commands that which is good, and punishes evil in all, whether rich, or poor, high or low,—'Tis deaf, inexorable, inflexible." On the one hand it is inexorable to the cries and lamentations of the prisoners; on the other it is deaf, deaf as an adder to the clamours of the populace.[37]

Thus ended a most remarkable chapter in John Adams's legal career, and in his development as a political thinker. He had begun the year 1770 firmly embedded in a rich tradition of English and continental law, with no apparent thought that he would bring either political questions or political authors into his legal practice. He ended the year with an impassioned appeal drawn from one of England's great republican martyrs, the kind of writer whom virtually every colonial American, including himself, had quite ignored from the Glorious Revolution of 1689 to the Stamp Act crisis. Adams did not, that December day, appeal to Algernon Sidney as an authority on republican government but rather on the nature of the law. But in merely quoting a republican author—after praising

"compleat Republicks" as conducive to the greatest degree of civil peace to be expected under any form of government—he signaled a new direction for his rapidly developing political ideas. His triumph in the trial of *Rex vs. Wemms* was a great personal victory. But for the student of John Adams's political thought, its significance lies not in what he had achieved but in where he might be headed.[38]

5. Personal Crisis and Renewal

Before John Adams could head anywhere, however, he had to take a pause to refresh his health and his spirits and to puzzle out just where he was and where he ought to go. Again, his own vivid reminiscence best sets the scene:

> The complicated Cases of my legal and political Engagements, the slender Diet to which I was obliged to confine myself, the Air of the Town of Boston which was not favourable to me who had been born and passed allmost all my life in the Country; but especially the constant Obligation to speak in public almost every day for many hours, had exhausted my health, brought on a Pain in my Breast and a complaint in my Lungs, which seriously threatened my Life, and compelled me, to throw off a great part of the Load of Business both public and private, and return to my farm in the Country.[39]

For Adams, 1770 had indeed been a trying year. In early February, John and Abigail's second daughter, one-year-old Susanna, died, just before a heavy load of legal business arrived in March and April, followed by journeys to courthouses in Plymouth and Barnstable in May (the month his second son, Charles, was born), and to Ipswich in June. That month was further complicated by his new duties in Cambridge as a member of the provincial assembly. With the nonimportation agreement against the Townshend duties still in effect, the pace of legal business slowed in July, but Adams used up half the month on a long journey to courthouses in Maine. In August his legal caseload picked up again, and the opening of the third session of the legislature in late September came at a most awkward time. In this long session, which extended into November, Adams received several committee assignments just as he was preparing to defend Captain Preston, and then more assignments as he was preparing to defend the soldiers. Legal business also called him to courthouses in Taunton in October, and Ipswich again in November. In December he finally got a short rest, with only one legislative duty, on the standing committee of correspondence, and Adams took advantage of this breather to move his family from one Boston house to another. But 1771 promised a whole new spate of legal and legislative work just over the horizon.[40]

By early spring Adams could foresee no lessening of the pace of his work. His January caseload in Suffolk County Inferior Court and February caseload in the Superior Court were as heavy as he had ever experienced. April brought

scores of new cases in Suffolk Inferior Court and Middlesex and Worcester superior courts, and the provincial House of Representatives convened for its last session. Adams now began to assert control over his stressful life. On 13 April, he moved his family back to Braintree, and four days later he entered the assembly for the last time, a week before the chamber concluded its labors. He would not serve in a legislature again until he entered the First Continental Congress in 1774. Yet he kept his law office in Boston, where he put in long hours; and he attended court sessions in Worcester in late April, and in Plymouth in mid-May. For several weeks he seems to have believed that by restricting himself to his practice on weekdays, avoiding all social and political activity in Boston, and relaxing with his family on weekends, he would get the rest he needed.[41] By late May, however, John Adams felt compelled to take more drastic action, both to give his body a rest and to allow his mind the time to face squarely a problem that he had been avoiding for some three years.

Eighteenth-century New Englanders did not take vacations. If they were of modest means, as most were, they worked every day they could get work, except (in most cases) on Sundays. An affluent few, especially those born to wealth, worked, often quite hard, when they wished to, and took their leisure whenever it pleased them. On 30 May 1771, John Adams began the first vacation of his life. Advised "to take a Journey to the Stafford Springs in Connecticutt, then in as much Vogue as any mineral Springs have been since," he left his young family in Braintree, and his law books and clerks in Boston, and set off on horseback, alone. He recorded his two weeks of riding, observing the countryside, and pondering the prospects of his country—essentially still just Massachusetts—in the longest, most sustained set of diary entries he had written since the Stamp Act crisis winter of 1765–66.[42]

For two days Adams traveled the familiar post road to Worcester, where he had lived, taught school, and begun his legal studies just after college, and where he had attended court sessions nearly every year since 1767, most recently in April 1771, just five weeks earlier. This June, however, he did no business there, but spent two days, including a Sabbath, looking up old friends and visiting locations that he remembered from his residence in the 1750s. He then headed west, turned south, crossed into Connecticut, which he had never seen, and reached Stafford by evening. Adams spent three full days at Stafford's therapeutic springs, drinking and bathing in the mineral-rich waters, making a few acquaintances, and riding around the rugged rural countryside. Then, without any evident prior intent, he decided to journey farther west to see the lower Connecticut River Valley, and for the next five days he passed through some of the most handsome towns and fertile countryside he had ever seen. He reached Middletown, which pleased him most of all, on 8 June, and was tempted to continue south to New Haven, but he suddenly realized that his legal obligations back in Massachusetts would allow no more pleasant excursions. In five

days of hard riding he returned briefly to Stafford Springs, then to Worcester, and finally, on 14 June, to Braintree, where he had just two days of rest before heading north to attend court sessions in Ipswich, York, and Falmouth (now Portland, Maine), another journey of over two weeks.[43]

Adams was soon convinced of the physical benefits of his vacation, and years later he wrote of his move back to Braintree and his visit to Stafford Springs: "The Air of my native Spot . . . together with daily rides on horse back and the Amusements of Agriculture always delightfull to me soon restored my health. . . . the Journey [through Connecticut] was of Use to me, whether the Waters were or not."[44] But on the road that spring he could never relax. On 3 June, before he even reached Connecticut, he recorded that "my Office and Farm frequently steal into my Mind, and seem to demand my Return. They must both suffer for Want of my Presence." By 7 June, as he headed toward the Connecticut River from Stafford, he "began to grow weary of this idle, romantic Jaunt" and thought "it would have been as well to have staid in my own Country." He again missed his family, his farm, and even his "Office, Books, and Clerks." By 10 June, on his return up the Connecticut River, his anxiety and the summer heat ruined his sleep, and "my Meditations on my Pillow were unhappy." Two days later, as he approached Worcester, he was sure that he had had "a naked, barren Journey. My Brains have been as barren the whole time, as a sandy Plain, or a gravelly Nole. My Soul has been starved."[45]

On 13 June, Adams mood darkened yet more as he first learned of an unexpected political development that had occurred in Massachusetts during his brief absence. "I hear much to day and Yesterday of the Harmony prevailing between the Governor and the House [of Representatives]. . . . Behold how good and pleasant it is for Brethren to dwell together in Unity. It seems to be forgotten entirely, by what means Hutchinson procured the Government."[46] Launching into a review of the governor's sycophancy toward his predecessor, Governor Bernard, and the British ministry, he continued:

> Posterity will scarcely find it possible, to form a just Idea of this Gentlemans Character. But if this wretched Journal should ever be read, by my own Family, let them know that there was upon the Scene of Action with Mr. Hutchinson, one determined Enemy to those Principles and that Political System to which alone he owes his own and his Family's late Advancement—one who thinks that his Character and Conduct have been the Cause of laying a Foundation for perpetual Discontent and Uneasiness between Britain and the Colonies, of perpetual Struggles of one Party for Wealth and Power at the Expense of the Liberties of this Country, and of perpetual Contention and Opposition in the other Party to preserve them, and that this Contention will never be fully terminated but by Warrs, and Confusions and Carnage. Caesar, by destroying the Roman Republic, made himself perpetual Dictator, Hutchinson, by

> countenancing and supporting a System of Corruption and all Tyranny, has made himself Governor—and the mad Idolatry of the People, always the surest Instruments of their own Servitude, laid prostrate at the Feet of both. With great Anxiety, and Hazard, with continual Application to Business, with loss of Health, Reputation, Profit, and as fair Prospects and Opportunities of Advancement, as others who have greedily embraced them, I have for 10 Years together invariably opposed this System, and its fautors [i.e., supporters]. It has prevailed in some Measure, and the People are now worshipping the Authors and Abetters of it, and despizing, insulting, and abusing, the Opposers of it.[47]

This remarkable passage, one of the most impassioned and confessional in Adams's diary since his 1768 meditation on his purpose in life, whether to aim for "Fame, Fortune, [and] Power," or the "Service of God, Country, Clients, [and] Fellow Men,"[48] conveys a sense of the discouragement in Patriot ranks in this first year of the "quiet period," between the Townshend Act crisis and the Tea Act, that is often overlooked. But Adams had another surprise before he blew out his candle for the night: "Read this days Paper. The melodious Harmony, the perfect Concords, the entire Confidence and Affection, that seems to be restored greatly surprises me. Will it be lasting [?]. I believe there is no Man in so curious a Situation as I am. I am for what I can see, quite left alone, in the World."[49]

Something seems amiss in this remarkable diary entry, something that should strain the credulity of any careful student of the coming of the American Revolution in Massachusetts, and of anyone seeking a thorough understanding of John Adams's political career. Did Adams actually believe, on 13 June 1771, that he had been more "invariably opposed to [the political] System [of Governor Hutchinson]" than his cousin Samuel Adams, or Dr. Joseph Warren (to name just two of the most prominent Patriot leaders), or that the governor had only "one determined Enemy to [his] Principles"? Could he really have felt that, after Hutchinson had—apparently—engineered a rapprochement with his opponents, he, John Adams, was "quite left alone" in his opposition? Because Adams was an exceptionally candid writer in probing his self-understanding, and an exceptionally self-critical diarist, he must have held these beliefs sincerely, if only for a short while. But why? A critical appraisal of his thoughts and deeds over the past several years may suggest some answers.

The imperial crisis confronted John Adams with a serious problem. He was utterly convinced, from the date of his authorship of *A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* and the instructions to Braintree's legislative representative to oppose the Stamp Act, both written and published in 1765, that British North Americans who valued their liberties must oppose London's new imperial policies. But he felt most reluctant to take a visible, leading role in opposing them.

His first, celebrated resistance efforts, from August 1765 to February 1767, were as a plausibly anonymous—yet fairly widely identified—essayist in Boston's newspapers, a role in which he succeeded brilliantly. The next step, to stand before the public as an organizer and spokesman, would not be so easy. For more than two years after moving to Boston in April 1768, Adams stoutly resisted appeals to make this decisive commitment and even declined to attend town meetings. Moreover, after May 1768, he ceased his political journalism for nearly five years. He did, however, submit to important halfway measures: sitting on committees whose members drafted, and signed, public documents for the town of Boston and letters for the city's Sons of Liberty. And in June 1770 he agreed, certainly with reluctance, to serve as a Boston representative in the provincial assembly.

These were more visible patriotic roles than his journalism, but except for his involvement with the Sons of Liberty, each was an ostensibly nonpartisan activity that allowed Adams some freedom to shape his political behavior, whether radical, moderate, or even conservative, as he chose, and that he could defend as the proper duty of any member of the province's politically active class. Both as a town committeeman, however, and as a legislator, he consistently allied with both local and provincial Patriot leaders and against the administrations of Governor Bernard in 1768–69 and Governor Hutchinson thereafter. Yet, as late as 1770, John Adams remained, especially in his own mind, a man in the middle, and in this position he was becoming increasingly uncomfortable. He continued to keep some distance from the more outspoken style of Samuel Adams and Dr. Warren, yet he felt unappreciated for the solid contributions that he did make to the defense of Massachusetts's political liberties.

Adams first expressed this feeling in his diary, upon his defeat by Ebenezer Thayer for Braintree's seat in the provincial assembly in May 1766, a setback that he regarded as a most ungrateful reward for his opposition to the Stamp Act.[50] Throughout the following decade, until he became fully committed to independence, he was careful to keep any expression of ambivalence he may have felt about the Patriot movement, and of any resentment he felt at being unappreciated for what he had done for the Patriot cause, largely to himself, recording them only in his diary. And it is his diary, the principal—and often the only—source for any understanding of John Adams between his first appearance before the Suffolk County bar in 1758 and his entry into the First Continental Congress in 1774, that traces his private feelings about his public role and about the reactions of his countrymen to that role.

John Adams's diary, in contrast to the massive journals of his son John Quincy Adams, and his grandson Charles Francis Adams, was only occasionally a conventional record of what he did, whom he met, and what they did, either with or to him, or to each other. The true subject of the greater part of the text was the diarist's inner thoughts and emotions, not as he might have experienced

them every day or even every month, but at those times and seasons when his inner life held a particular importance or fascination for him, and most particularly when he faced intellectual or emotional problems that required some resolution. He began his entry of 27 June 1770 by observing: "The only Way to compose myself and collect my Thoughts is to set down at my Table, place my Diary before me, and take my Pen in my Hand. This Apparatus takes off my Attention from other Objects."[51]

Both the biographer and the historian must regret that the diary is often fragmentary and incomplete; on occasion Adams himself lamented not attending to it more faithfully.[52] Yet he may well have seen his diary as less fragmentary, if not more complete, than most readers are likely to see it. And when viewed as a whole, this most intimate journal, both in several extended passages and in occasional brief sentences, phrases, and even single words, offers a rare view into the thoughts and emotions of a man who lived a full, complex life of the mind, coupled indissolubly with an active public life at the center of the largest and most profound political transformations of his day.

This diary, in a host of details large and small, reveals John Adams's problem with engaging fully in political opposition to a provincial executive whom he despised and an imperial government that he deeply feared. Active political opposition presented many difficulties. It was time-consuming and physically wearing and, over time, could threaten his health. It often required dealing with men who spoke and behaved in deeply frustrating ways, especially James Otis Jr., who tried every Boston Patriot's patience as he passed in and out of manic episodes, until he became quite incapacitated. Adams was also convinced that patriotic activity threatened his growing legal reputation and diminished his income, both in the time it took away from his practice and in the offense it gave to some clients. And the tactics of active patriotism often required compromise, an art that Adams had developed, of necessity, as a lawyer, but which he always found emotionally taxing. Finally, when he had invested the required time and energy, mastered his tedium and his temper at boring or trying colleagues, accepted the damage to his career, and swallowed his pride to reach agreements that he regarded as less than perfect, he rarely felt that his sacrifices were appreciated or his motivations understood, either by his political colleagues or by the public.[53]

By the winter of 1771, Adams had endured each of these frustrations, and the pressure of mounting legal work, for nearly three years, and he was becoming upset and short-tempered. On 15 February, an evening of political discussion somehow put him "in great Anxiety and distress, and [I] had a most unhappy Night—never in more misery, in my whole Life." He moved his family back to Braintree on 13 April, and three days later, regretting that political circumstances had prevented him from serving the people more effectively as a legislator, he looked forward to finishing his duties. On 20 April, shortly after attending

the assembly for the last time, he resolved: "I shall be no more perplexed. . . . But shall divide my Time between Boston and Braintree, between Law and Husbandry. Farewell Politics."[54]

But Adams discovered that he could not shut the door so quickly on his most political year, and in early May he reflected bitterly on his public service. When a cousin in Braintree told him that he had made several enemies, including two "very valuable Clients" and Governor Hutchinson, he assured his diary this meant nothing: "These people were all my Foes before, but they thought it in their Interest to disguise it." With the beginning of the brief spring of good feelings between the governor and many of the province's political leaders, however, "they think themselves at Liberty to speak it out." But this quick dismissal of his enemies hardly expressed his true feelings about public life. On the previous day, he had confessed deeper emotions to his diary:

> I have acted my sentiments, with the Utmost Frankness, at Hazard of all, and the certain Loss of ten times more than it is in the Power of the People to give me, for the sake of the People, and now I reap nothing but Insult, Ridicule and Contempt for it, even from many of the People themselves. However, I have not hitherto regarded Consequences to myself. I have very chearfully sacrificed my Interest, and my Health and Ease and Pleasure in the service of the People. I have stood by their friends longer than they would stand by them. I have stood by the People much longer than they would stand by themselves, But, I have learn'd Wisdom by Experience. I shall certainly become more retired, and cautious. I shall certainly mind my own Farm, and my own Office.[55]

By the late spring of 1771, physically worn out, mentally exhausted, and quite out of sorts with his countrymen, Adams was ready for his Connecticut vacation. But when he returned home his worst fears were confirmed, and he was astonished to see a political world that looked very different from the one to which he had devoted his full efforts in 1770. His reaction was an outburst—an inner outburst, for his diary only—at what he saw as the faithlessness of both his political comrades and the people of Massachusetts, who now seemed eager to support their wily, power-hungry governor, the debased tool of a malevolent British ministry. Quite ignoring how implausible it was to imagine that many other Patriot leaders were not themselves dismayed at this startling expression of good feelings for Governor Hutchinson, John Adams leapt to the conclusion that he was politically alone in the world.

Mid-June 1771 saw the low point of John Adams's spirits, the depths of what may have been the most profound emotional crisis he had ever experienced. But his body was probably already on the mend. His journey through Connecticut, two additional weeks on horseback traveling to court sessions in northern Massachusetts and Maine into July, and generous weekends spent with his

family in Braintree through the summer and fall greatly improved his health. Moreover his legal practice, which he feared had been compromised by his political activities, continued to thrive. He was as busy as ever, and his income was limited only by the time he was able to devote to his cases. His attitude toward Massachusetts's resistance politics now began to improve, but he adhered quite strictly to his resolve to avoid evenings at Boston's political clubs and carefully limited his political commitments in 1772 and 1773 to the drafting of legal and constitutional arguments that he could prepare on his own, in his office, without the frustrations and compromises he had endured as a legislator.[56]

The unexpected outbreak of good feelings between Governor Hutchinson and the legislature that had so distressed Adams in June soon ceased to concern him. Like similar moods in other colonies at the outset of the quiet period, this hope that a new political harmony would prevail soon evaporated. By 1772 colonists everywhere were again on their guard against any sign of renewed British threats to their political autonomy, and Massachusetts resumed its customary station as the flashpoint of imperial controversy in North America.[57] Adams himself, however, was in no hurry to claim too prominent a part in the revitalized resistance movement. He reentered public life gradually and began by delivering a public oration in Braintree. Only after again moving his family to Boston at the end of the year did he resume his favorite role, which he had largely set aside in 1768—that of the leading scholar and penman of his province's opposition to Britain's arbitrary rule.

6. An Oration on Government at Braintree

At their annual town meeting in March 1772, the first since John Adams's return to Braintree the previous spring, his neighbors formally requested him to prepare "an oration relative to the civil & religious rights & Priviledges of the People" for delivery to the townsmen on the following election day. The town records do not show whether Adams was present at this meeting, nor is there any report of his address to the voters in May. But he did write an extensive rough draft for such an oration, and that draft gives the fullest view of his ideas about government since his third "Clarendon" essay of January 1766. It also reveals Adams's growing interest in a form of government—a republic—to which he had rarely ever made direct reference, but which appears, from small hints, to have been slowly gestating in some corner of his busy mind for several years. A review of his earliest ideas and feelings on this elusive subject may clarify the development of his political thought.[58]

In the mid-eighteenth century the word *republic* conveyed a cluster of meanings that shared one thing in common, their apparent distance from the political life and mind of British North America. The few colonials who thought about such matters recognized that republican governments, large and small, had a general structure that distinguished them from the two other forms of

government, monarchies and tyrannies, which dominated most nations of Europe and Asia. But real embodiments of this structure showed considerable variety. The highly commercial Venetian and Dutch republics entrusted quasi-monarchical figures with important military and diplomatic powers. A few small, agrarian republics functioned as rural democracies, with only the weakest executive authority and hardly any visible privileged class. Most surviving European republics of at least moderate size had vibrant aristocracies, but these elites varied enormously in their power and cohesion, and virtually all such polities were based on cooperation between distinct social classes, each of which was acknowledged to have an inherent right to a particular share of political authority. The idea of a republic as a government whose entire authority rested squarely on the consent of the whole people, which is now nearly universal either in genuine practice or in cynically hypocritical rhetoric, did not inform the political structure of a single nation of any size in the modern world before the American Revolution.[59]

Moreover, both a familiarity with actual republics and the use of the word republic to indicate a distinct type of contemporary government were relatively rare in eighteenth-century British North America and in Britain itself. This was hardly accidental. The English had briefly tried and then rejected their own republican-style Commonwealth in the seventeenth century, and had scrupulously avoided the republican label for any aspect of their Glorious Revolution of 1689. The European powers that dominated North America were all highly centralized monarchies, including Britain's constitutional regime. The continent's historical record, too, was decidedly against republics. The Macedonian empire had sharply reduced the independence of history's first republics, the scores of city-states in ancient Greece, both democracies, like Athens, and the more numerous aristocratic oligarchies. The Roman Republic had collapsed in civil war, to be replaced by the Roman Empire. And the sixteenth-century French monarchy had dealt a fatal blow to republican government in Florence and elsewhere in northern Italy. The Dutch Republic had survived two centuries of Spanish oppression and English rivalry, but it was in commercial and political decline by the late eighteenth century. Republican government, whatever claims it had to political virtue, simply appeared too weak to survive in the highly competitive world of European empires and their colonies.

Yet John Adams, in the face of this long train of historical discouragements, gradually turned to republican thought as he attempted to understand the growing failure of the British Empire to supply the kind of government that his Massachusetts countrymen thought they deserved. He could do this because the republican tradition, severely battered as it had been over the centuries, had not expired. Europe's surviving republics continued to nurture several political philosophers and scholars of international law whom Adams had studied since he began his legal practice and then his literary career, including Hugo Grotius

in seventeenth-century Holland and Emmerich de Vattel and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in eighteenth-century Switzerland.[60] The works of England's republican theorists, notably James Harrington, Algernon Sidney, and John Locke, were also readily at hand for any colonist who sought an alternative history of the English nation. The social contract theorists, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, all posited the thesis that before the prehistoric—and therefore hidden—origins of human government, the people, as autonomous individuals, had possessed ultimate political authority, which they had collectively surrendered to powerful leaders, on widely varying terms, to gain peace and security. And John Locke, at least, along with Harrington and Sidney, was clear that the people had the right to reclaim the authority that their unknown ancestors had surrendered. This original authority could be the foundation for governments that displayed a considerable structural variety.

Adams first deployed ideas that were central to the republican tradition in his third "Clarendon" essay, published in January 1766, in which he asserted the right of the people to a fundamental role in government, both through their election of representatives to a legislature with the power to approve or reject all taxes and by their participation in virtually all trials as jurors. But he did not use the words *republic* or *republican* in 1766, or for several years thereafter. He probably purchased his first book by a republican author, Algernon Sidney's *Discourses on Government*, in 1766, but he may not have read it before 1769, and he did not quote from this work or, quite independently of that quotation, use the word republic, until his December 1770 summation to the jury in the trial of the British soldiers accused of the Boston Massacre. From 1768 through 1770, however, as a member of a Boston Sons of Liberty committee, he composed and signed letters to the radical English Whig John Wilkes, and from 1770 through 1773 he occasionally corresponded, on his own, with the radical Whig historian Catharine Macaulay.[61]

Then in June 1771, traveling through Wethersfield, Connecticut, John Adams stopped at the inn of a widow Griswold and

> [s]at down to Table with the old Woman [i.e., the landlady] and another Woman, and a dirty, long, greybearded Carpenter who was at Work for Landlady, and might be smelled from one Room to the other—So that these Republicans are not very decent or neat. Landlady and her Housewright very very chatty about Boston, Providence, Newport, Marthas Vineyard And Nantuckett. Landlady says the Deputy Governor calls here and always has some comical Story to tell her. He asked her tother day to come down to see his Wife make cheese. He has 22 Cows, and his Women make Cheese in the forenoon and then dress up and go out, or receive Company at home.[62]

Adams had entered several of these vivid, often charming vignettes of country life into his diary for years, but never before had he labeled the subjects of his

observations "Republicans." His intention here is not entirely clear. His subjects present themselves as common folk, and the carpenter is pungently unwashed. Yet they are both curious and well informed about the world around them, in Massachusetts and Rhode Island as well as in their native colony. And the landlady claims an intimate acquaintance with Connecticut's deputy governor, whose family, she says, lives an unpretentious rural life, just as she does. Adams's "Republicans" may be common folk, or merely any New Englanders going about their daily lives without show. But they would soon become, as Adams would make clear over the next several decades, his people, the basic stock of republican life that he was just in the process of discovering, beginning in his own hometown.[63]

The surviving draft for Adams's Braintree oration is too brief and, as it proceeds, appears too unfinished to convey accurately the full dimensions of the thoughts that he presumably imparted to his neighbors in May 1772. But its first sections, amounting to over half of the text, are well organized and fairly polished and invite a comparison with his third "Clarendon" essay. From the outset, Adams embraced a larger topic and painted on a broader canvas than he had in 1766. In that earlier essay his subject was the British constitution, and his goal was to explain the particular virtues of Britain's political tradition, whose general superiority was self-evident to his Yankee readership, without any reference to the political history of the non-English-speaking world.[64]

In 1772, however, Adams began by declaring: "The Origin, the Nature, the Principles and the Ends of Government, in all Ages, the ignorant as well as the enlightened, and in all Nations, the barbarous as well as civilized, have employed the Wits of ingenious Men." Then, moving beyond his earlier satisfaction with singing the praises of a received national tradition, he embraced his broader Enlightenment faith by asserting that government is a science and, "like all other Sciences, is best pursued by Observation And Experiment." Because "Men are the Objects of this Science," "we should spread before Us a Map of Man," in every climate and nation, in all his religions and customs, "in a State of Ignorance and enlightened with Knowledge, in Slavery and in freedom, in Infancy and Age." This led him to the fundamental Lockean credo:

> Government is nothing more than the combined Force of Society, or the united Power of the Multitude, for the Peace, Order, Safety, Good and Happiness of the People, who compose the Society. There is no King or Queen Bee distinguished from all others, by Size or Figure, or beauty and Variety of Colours, in the human Hive. No Man has yet produced any Revelation from Heaven in his favour, any divine Communication to govern his fellow Men. Nature throws us all into the World equall and alike.
>
> . . . The Author of Nature has left it wholly in the Choice of the People, to make what mutual Covenants, to erect what Kind of Governments, and to

> exalt what Persons they please to power and dignities, for their own Ease, Convenience, and Happiness.[65]

Adams next surveyed the variety of governments that men had chosen. "There are only Three simple Forms of Government," he stated: "Democracy, or the Rule of the Many," "Aristocracy, or the Rule of the Few," and "Monarchy, or the Rule of one, in this Case the whole Legislative and Executive Power is in the Breast of one Man." But he immediately added that there were "two other Kinds of Monarchies. One is when the supreme Power is not in a single Person, but in the Laws, the Administration being committed solely to the Prince"; the other was "a limited Monarchy, where the Nobles or the Commons or both have a Check upon all the Acts of Legislation of the Prince." Beyond these basic forms, Adams saw "an indefinite Variety of other Forms of Government, occasioned by different Combinations of the Powers of Society, and different Intermixtures of these Forms of Government, one with another."[66]

Up to this point, Adams's only significant addition to the political science of his third "Clarendon" essay was his explicit endorsement of Locke's social contract. But immediately following his list of types of government, he flatly declared: "The best Governments of the World have been mixed. The Republics of Greece, Rome, Carthage, were all mixed Governments. The English, Dutch, and Swiss, enjoy the Advantages of mixed Government at this Day." Then he introduced the central problem of tripartite mixed governments through history:

> Sometimes Kings have courted the People in Opposition to the Nobles. At other Times the Nobles have united with the People in Opposition to Kings. But Kings and Nobles have much oftener combined together, to crush, to humble, and to Fleece the People.
>
> But this is an unalterable Truth, that the People can never be enslaved but by their own Tameness, Pusillanimity, Sloth or Corruption.
>
> They may be deceived, and their Simplicity, Ignorance, and Docility render them frequently liable to deception. And of this, the aspiring, designing, ambitious few are very sensible. He is the Statesman qualified by Nature to scatter Ruin and Destruction in his Path who by deceiving a Nation can render Despotism desirable in their Eyes and make himself popular in Undoing.
>
> The Preservation of Liberty depends upon the intellectual and moral Character of the People. As long as Knowledge and Virtue are diffused generally among the Body of a Nation, it is impossible they should be enslaved. This can be brought to pass only by debasing their Understandings, or by corrupting their Hearts.[67]

Only after outlining this global view of popular liberty did Adams identify the recent imperial policies of the British Empire, and their implementation by

royal governors and Admiralty court judges, as the corrupting forces in colonial life. Before proceeding to the malign details, however, he suddenly returned to his categorization of the various types of government, and applied a spectrum of relative values to them that had not previously appeared in his writings, whether public or private:

> Liberty, under every conceivable Form of Government is always in Danger. It is so even under a simple, or perfect Democracy, more so under a mixed Government, like the Republic of Rome, and still more so under a limited Monarchy.

Never before had John Adams privileged democracy over a mixed government, such as the Roman Republic, or placed a limited monarchy, such as Britain, in the third rank of governments that favored human liberty. And in expanding on this declaration in the text that followed, he appears in the spring of 1772, for the first and last time in his writings, to value democratic Athens—although not by name—over republican Rome.[68]

Turning to Massachusetts, Adams drew his neighbors' attention to certain unnamed "Persons now living in this Province, who for a long Course of their younger Years, professed and were believed to be the Guardian Angells of our civil and Religious Liberties, whose latter Conduct, since they have climbed up by Popularity to Power, has exhibited as great a Contrast to their former Professions and Principles, as ever was seen in a Stafford, an Harley, or a Walpole" (three English leaders whom Adams had just labeled as corrupt tools of tyranny). Governor Thomas Hutchinson and his associates were Adams's unmistakable targets, and he implored his listeners to be on their guard; "great Kingdoms of Europe [he later identified France, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, and Poland] have once been free. But . . . have lost their Liberties, by the Ignorance, the Weakness, the Inconstancy, and Disunion of the People." England, however, had been exceptionally fortunate because its nobles had united with the people to restore, by Magna Carta, the ancient Saxon liberties lost at the Norman Conquest.[69]

The draft oration then proceeded to a cluster of more fragmentary remarks on the role of "the popular Power" in government. Qualifying his earlier placement of "perfect Democracy" above even mixed government in guaranteeing liberty, Adams declared: "Liberty depends upon an exact Ballance, a nice Counterpoise of all the Powers of the state." But after condemning the most recent imperial policies in Massachusetts, particularly the Crown's decision to pay the governor's salary "out of a Revenue extorted from this People" (the import duties on sugar, molasses, and tea), he asserted:

> It is the popular Power, the democraticall Branch of our Constitution that is invaded.

> If K[ing], Lords and Commons, can make Laws to bind Us in all Cases whatsoever, The People here will have no Influence, no Check, no Power, no Controul, no Negative.
>
> And the Government we are under, instead of being a mixture of Monarchy, Aristocracy and Democracy, will be a Mixture only of Monarchy and Aristocracy. For the Lords and Commons may be considered equally with Regard to Us as Nobles, as the few, as Aristocratical Grandees, independent of Us the People, uninfluenced by Us, having no fear of Us, nor Love for Us.[70]

Adams offered no sure solution to this dismal state of affairs, but he concluded his draft with the observation that every European country that had voted money to its monarchs before securing the right to examine the state of the nation and demand a redress of grievances had lost its liberty. "What Opportunities," he asked, "shall we in this Province have to demand and obtain the Redress of Grievances, if our Governors and Judges and other Officers and Magistrates are to be supported by the Ministry, without the Gifts of the People." Massachusetts's bleak future, he suggested, could be seen in two British colonies, Barbados and Virginia, where the royal governors had been granted independent salaries "by the imprudent shortsighted Acts of their own Assemblies. What is the Consequence[?]"[71]

John Adams's 1772 oration at Braintree is the fullest expression of his developing constitutional thought between his "Clarendon" essays of 1766 and his official, anonymous encounter with Governor Hutchinson in 1773, and the strongest testament of his interest in republicanism before his *Novanglus* letters of 1775. At Braintree he declared more explicitly than in any of his previous essays both his Enlightenment faith that politics, and all human behavior, must be treated as a science and his endorsement of John Locke's view of the origins of human government in a social contract.[72] His Braintree oration, however, advanced three new propositions that do not appear either in his "Clarendon" essays or elsewhere in his early writings, public or private: there are three distinct varieties of monarchy; several contemporary European states testify to the continued vitality of mixed governments; and democracy is the most effective form of all governments in protecting human liberty.

The purest form of monarchy, in Adams's view, was the vesting of "the whole Legislative and Executive Power . . . in the Breast of one Man." This was simply tyranny, on prominent display in Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and a host of Asian kingdoms, large and small. Adams was more concerned, however, with its advance in early modern Europe, arguing that it had become the dominant form of government in several European kingdoms that had once enjoyed considerable reputations for liberty: in France and Spain, and in Sweden, Denmark, and Poland. Two other forms of monarchy, however, were of the highest significance for Britain and its colonies. In the first, "the Supreme Power is not

in a single Person but in the Laws, the Administration being committed solely to the Prince." The second was "a limited Monarchy, where the Nobles or Commons or both have a Check upon all the Acts of Legislation of the Prince." Over the next seven years, as he looked more deeply into the British constitution and puzzled out what form of government would best serve the new, independent states in Revolutionary America, John Adams would conclude that the ideal executive in any free government must incorporate both these concepts of monarchy.[73]

At first reading, Adams's brief mention of republics in his Braintree oration appears more straightforward than his parsing of monarchy; he simply equated republics with mixed governments and saw no need to elaborate on the meaning of the word. But in 1772 this provincial subject of a constitutional monarchy could not yet bring himself to use the word republic to refer to any contemporary European government. Both the Netherlands and Venice were commonly—and officially—called republics in the eighteenth century, but Adams described all contemporary nations that partook of some measure of ancient republican wisdom and structure as enjoying "the Advantages of mixed Governments at this Day."

Despite his caution, however, Adams's new interest in the reality behind the word republic is of the first importance in the development of his political thought for two reasons. First, he had never before in his writings, public or private (except for the hint in his June 1771 diary entry in Connecticut), showed even the slightest awareness of contemporary republics. The following year at Braintree, however, he readily conceded the advantages of the form in contemporary Switzerland and the Netherlands. Second, and of equal importance, the manner in which he did this highlights one of the most distinctive aspects of his republican thought. Adams so thoroughly equated republics, both ancient and modern, with mixed governments that he accorded to any limited monarchy that properly acknowledged the powers of aristocracy and democracy all the respect due to any government that was formally named a republic.[74] This inclusion of constitutional monarchies under the republican label would appear again, explicitly in his *Novanglus* letters in 1775 and in his magnum opus, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*, in 1787–88, and implicitly in virtually all of his political thought from the 1770s until his death.

The most arresting idea in his draft oration, however, is his assertion that liberty "is always in danger. It is so even under a simple, or perfect Democracy, more so under a mixed Government, like the Republic of Rome, and still more under a limited Monarchy."[75] John Adams had never before, and would never again, pay democracy such a direct compliment or declare so emphatically that a limited monarchy threatened liberty more than a republic that made no provision for a monarch.

Why did Adams say this in 1772, at Braintree? And why did he never say it again? Time, place, and circumstance suggest a part of the answer to both questions. In Braintree he was addressing one of the purest democracies, a New England town, that had existed since the Macedonians crushed Athenian democracy in the fourth century BCE. Moreover, his stated task was to instruct his neighbors in "the civil & religious rights & Priviledges of the People." It was not his duty, on that day, to preach to the "Nobles and Commons" of England, or to the unnamed "Persons now living in this Province" whom he regarded as having "invaded . . . the popular Power, the democraticall Branch of our Constitution."[76] When Adams came to address larger, more diverse audiences as citizens of more extensive polities, in his *Novanglus* letters (1775), his *Thoughts on Government* (1776), his draft of the Massachusetts Constitution (1779), and his *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States* (1787–88), he had different objectives that called for different approaches to the problem of creating and preserving free governments. And in his successive efforts to consider the balance of liberty and order in any organized society, he would discover other reasons, beyond the size and character of his audience, to redefine the most effective roles for democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy.

7. A Revival of Personal Spirit and Political Will

In the summer following his oration at Braintree, Adams reconsidered his recent move from Boston to the country. His legal practice was as busy and as lucrative as ever, and from the day he first moved his family back to Braintree, he had regularly commuted to do most of his work in his Boston office. His health also continued to improve, although he was convinced that he would never again feel as robust as he had before his first move into the city in 1768. In August 1772, he bought a house in the center of Boston near the courthouse, and by September, when his youngest son, Thomas Boylston, was born, he was resolved to move his family to his new city home. He was still wary of involvement in politics, and at the same time, still sensitive to criticism that he had not made important sacrifices for the Patriot cause. But on 24 November 1772, he brought his wife and four children to his Queen Street house in Boston, where he also kept his office. There John Adams hoped to live and work, undisturbed by the political world, for many years. In little over a month this hope vanished; in just over a year Britain's North American empire began to disintegrate.[77]

John Adams's return to Boston concluded the most difficult five years of his personal life and his public career. He had earlier faced two long periods of inner self-doubt, often accompanied by outward discouragement, and recorded both at length in his diary. During his college years and in Worcester, from 1752 until at least 1756, he had wrestled with his decision to abandon the prospect of a career in the ministry in favor of the law. And from 1758 to 1761, at Braintree, as he ran his minuscule legal practice out of some corner in his parents' house—

or out of his coat pocket—he had so few cases that he must have been dependent on his father for his board as well as his lodging. At this most inauspicious juncture he took to courting a local heiress, Hannah Quincy, whom he soon gave up as beyond his means, both material and emotional. But these were the growing pains of youth and early manhood. His father's death in 1761, his elevation to barrister in 1762, his rapidly growing practice, his election to important town offices, and his successful courtship of Abigail Smith from 1762 to 1764, when they married, placed John Adams, at age twenty-nine, in possession of a beloved wife, a small but serviceable house and office, an adequate income, and the respect of his community.[78]

The five years beginning in 1768 presented a quite different challenge. Adams entered them in the midst of marital happiness and a growing family, a still expanding legal practice, and a broadening political reputation in Boston as well as Braintree. But the stress of his legal work and his growing political discomfort had already generated uncertainties about his proper role as a political spokesman, as a lawyer, and as a man, which he expressed so vividly in his diary in January 1768. At that point he might have chosen, for his peace of mind, to slow down, to stay in Braintree, and to withdraw entirely from the province's increasingly contentious politics. But he elected to forge ahead professionally by moving to Boston, and to stay politically involved through committee work even as he ceased writing political essays. The year 1770 brought all these stresses to a crisis as he sought to juggle his now very large legal practice, his new duties as a member of the legislature, and the unprecedented challenge of defending the British soldiers charged with the Boston Massacre.

In April 1771, John Adams retreated to Braintree and terminated all his political activity, and in May he took the first vacation of his life. His brief journey to Connecticut appears to have been most beneficial to both his physical and his emotional health. Even though he could not relax while he was on the road, away from his home, his family, and the law, his personal crisis evidently peaked during this sojourn and began to subside as soon as he returned to Braintree. A full recovery of his equanimity took more than a year, extending into the fall of 1772, but at its end he felt strong enough to return to Boston and bear his heavy professional load without complaint.

What happened to the political John Adams, however, was more remarkable. In 1768 he had stopped writing for the Boston press and would not resume publishing his work until 1773. He had also tried, with mixed success, to limit his political activity just as Dr. Joseph Warren, and his cousin Samuel Adams, pressed him to become more involved in Boston's efforts to resist Britain's imperial policies. The anxiety he had felt in the winter of 1765–66 over the cost that America's resistance to the Stamp Act would exact from his professional career had returned and persisted from 1768 to 1771, as he agonized over sacrificing his health, his welfare, and his family's future to the defense of colonial rights in

which he deeply believed. This collision of expediency with conviction must have contributed to the sense of personal crisis he felt by the winter of 1771.

But his first reaction to his own declared political vacation was a sudden, intense panic, just as he returned from Connecticut in June 1771, and mistakenly concluded that Massachusetts's popular leaders had permanently set aside their differences with Governor Thomas Hutchinson and finally accepted a new imperial regime in America. In his daily behavior, Adams mostly avoided Boston's political clubs and kept out of politics for another year, but in his mind something quite new was happening. His reading in republican authors, which had begun no later than 1769 with Algernon Sidney's *Discourses*, now clearly extended to either a renewed or a first reading of John Locke's *Two Treatises on Government*, and perhaps to other political thinkers, as well as to historians of ancient Greece and Rome.[79] Did this reading prompt a sudden hint, almost a slip of the pen, when Adams referred, for the first time in his life, to a few New Englanders he met on the road in Connecticut as "Republicans"? What happened next strongly suggests this.

In May 1772, in Braintree, Adams came out of political retirement to speak in a new voice. Left behind was the provincial pride of his 1765 *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law*, and his 1767 letters by "Governor Winthrop" to "Governor Bradford." Gone was the 1766 British nationalism of "Clarendon"'s veneration for the British constitution. In his election-day oration on government in Braintree, Adams's vision embraced the entire history of Western political thought, from fifth-century BCE Athens to contemporary Britain and the European Continent. His lesson for his neighbors, the object of his praise, was the sole form of government that could bridge this vast expanse of time and space: a republic. From that spring day forward, John Adams would see the future of protecting American liberty and promoting the American people's happiness from a fresh perspective, whether that future would lie within the British Empire, as he continued to hope it would for three more years, or would have to be constructed outside that empire, as he would conclude it must be in the year preceding American Independence.

III

Realm versus Dominion

1773–1774

> "It is impossible, your Excellency says, that there should be two independent Legislatures in one and the same State." May we not then further conclude, that . . . the Colonies were by their Charters made distinct States from the Mother Country? Your Excellency adds, "For although there may be but one Head, the King, yet the two Legislative Bodies will make two Governments as distinct as the Kingdoms of England and Scotland before the Union." Very true, may it please your Excellency; and if they interfere not with each other, what hinders but that being united in one Head and common Sovereign, they may live happily in that Connection and mutually support and protect each other?
>
> *Reply of the Massachusetts House of Representatives to Governor Thomas Hutchinson, 26 January 1773*

The five years from 1772 through 1776 were among the most productive of John Adams's long career and among the most important for his contribution to the freedom and happiness of his new nation, the United States of America. Early in this period he finally resolved the doubts about resisting British authority that had vexed him since the late 1760s. In 1772, he first championed a republican, or "mixed," government at Braintree; in 1773, he both posited the centrality of an independent judiciary in any free government and advanced America's fundamental argument for its independence from Parliament; in 1774, he reduced the claim for colonial autonomy to its simplest terms in the fourth article of the First Continental Congress's Declaration of Rights and Grievances; in 1775, he perfected the defense of this argument with copious historical examples and legal citations, while asserting the distinctive position that the British constitution was in its essence republican; and early in 1776, he published the most important statement of America's republican orthodoxy to appear before Independence. Finally, on 1 July 1776, he delivered the closing

argument for separating from Great Britain on the floor of the Continental Congress.

Of these several achievements, John Adams was probably the first American to openly praise republican government, even in its most democratic historical manifestations (1772), and was one of the earliest advocates of an independent judiciary in America (1773). He was not the first American to declare that Britain's North American colonies were totally independent of Parliament; Virginia's Richard Bland, in a 1766 pamphlet, and Pennsylvania's James Wilson, in an unpublished essay written in 1768 (but published only in 1774), had preceded him. But he was the first to advance the legal and historical argument for this position in an official, public declaration of a colonial assembly (Massachusetts, in 1773), and in 1775 he mounted the fullest defense of America's independence from Parliament prior to Independence.[1] Capping all his efforts was his *Thoughts on Government* of April 1776, the most elegant, succinct, and effective pamphlet of his long career, and the finest statement of America's new republican orthodoxy as it separated from the British Empire.

The rapid sequence of these half dozen major orations and writings in just over four years, and the centrality of each to America's emerging new political orthodoxy, might suggest an uninterrupted linear flow in Adams's thought, but this was not the case. Having reached the threshold of republicanism in his Braintree oration of May 1772, he stepped back, in January 1773, to engage the traditionally nonrepublican English worlds of judicial precedent and constitutional monarchy in exchanges with General William Brattle and Governor Thomas Hutchinson. This was not part of any larger intellectual plan; Adams simply took up two important causes as they presented themselves to him and advocated for each largely within the confines of English and Anglo-American judicial and political history.

But virtually everything that happened in North America from July 1772 to August 1774 drew Adams away from speculations about ideal forms and proper labels for government and toward a more immediate task, defending the right of the province of Massachusetts (and, soon thereafter, of every British North American colony) to retain the government it already possessed, with its broad and inviolable autonomous powers, within the British Empire. There was little point in the colonies' imagining perfect republics while their very right to self-government was under attack. In 1772, the British ministry laid claim to the Massachusetts legislature's traditional right to pay the salaries of, and thereby exercise some control over, the governor and the Superior Court judges. In early 1773, Adams explored the legal and historical basis for Massachusetts's retaining that and many other rights. At the end of 1773, he praised the Boston Tea Party as a manly assertion of the province's autonomy. In the winter of 1774, he advised the legislature that it had the power to impeach Chief Justice Peter Oliver for refusing to renounce his Crown salary in favor of his stipend from the legislature.

In May 1774 the imperial crisis deepened as Britain replaced Governor Thomas Hutchinson with General Thomas Gage, the commander of all British Army forces in North America. That same month, in its Massachusetts Government Act, Parliament unilaterally abrogated important clauses in the Massachusetts Charter of 1691 in order to take over the Council, control the county courts and sheriffs, and suppress disrespectful town meetings. In June, the last session of Massachusetts's House of Representatives responded by calling for a meeting of a continental congress in Philadelphia and electing several delegates, including John Adams, to that body. In August 1774, just as Governor Gage was vainly attempting to implement the Massachusetts Government Act, the delegates set off for the First Continental Congress.

John Adams began his response to this series of challenges to colonial autonomy by investigating the differences that history and law had made, over several centuries, between England and its various dominated nations, colonies, and dependencies, whether acquired by conquest (Ireland), dynastic union (Scotland), or discovery, conquest, and settlement (North America). His answer was to distinguish between the realm of England, ruled by the king and Parliament, and the vast array of dominion lands under the direct and, at least initially, total control of England's monarch. This distinction, he argued, was central to every major issue contested between Britain and Massachusetts since 1764, including the province's claim to an exclusive right to tax its constituents (violated by the Sugar, Stamp, and Townshend acts) and to pay the salaries of its governor and judges, and the inviolability of the source of those rights, the Massachusetts Charter of 1691. When Adams went to Congress in 1774, he argued for the same distinction, of realm versus dominion, as the basis for similar rights for every colony in British North America.

To understand and explain the complexities of the laws of the realm of England and its Parliament, and contrast it with the equally complex laws of Britain's vast dominion lands, took nearly all of John Adams's attention from early 1773 into 1775. For most of this period, he was confident that if he could only explain this distinction between realm and dominion to other Americans, and ultimately to the British Parliament, the British Empire would be saved from dissolution. But as he pursued this line of reasoning, political ideas of a more universal nature, suitable for founding and defending free governments in several locations and cultures, began to intrude, as early as his contribution to the Massachusetts assembly's second reply to Governor Hutchinson (March 1773), on his essential argument.

In 1773 and early 1774, however, the political convictions of Americans would not yet support a broader claim to liberty. Not until the popular response to Britain's Coercive Acts, especially the Massachusetts Government Act, began to transform the political culture in which Adams lived from one that fostered allegiance to a traditional constitutional monarchy to a very different one

that could entertain the prospect of a more republican style of government did he resume considering the republican tradition directly, as he had in Braintree in 1772. But when he took up the republican theme again, in the midst of writing his *Letters of Novanglus*, in March 1775, he proposed a strikingly original view of republicanism for America—and for Britain. By then his understanding of the constitutional foundation of a free state had fundamentally changed, and from the fall of 1775 until Independence, John Adams devoted the greater part of his intellectual energies to crafting a republican blueprint for the new nation that he saw emerging around him.

1. On the Independence of the Judges

Following his Braintree election-day oration in May 1772, John Adams kept a low political profile through the summer and fall. But the harmony between the governor and the legislature that had made an unexpected appearance in Massachusetts in 1771 was now ending, and the times were becoming rapidly unfavorable to any further retirement from public life. In July 1772, after several months of credible rumors, Governor Hutchinson finally confirmed the British ministry's decision to pay his salary out of the revenues from colonial customs duties on imported sugar, molasses, and tea. The legislature futilely protested the loss of its right to pay the executive and thereby exert some influence over his behavior, only to learn, in September, that the Superior Court judges, whose salaries it also paid, would henceforth draw their pay from the Crown as well. Patriot leaders acted with alarm, and John Adams, who had been widely regarded as the most learned lawyer in Massachusetts for several years, soon found that his legal expertise drew him into both salary controversies.[2]

In private Adams resisted his political fate to the final day of the passing year. On 29 December 1772, citing both "the feeble State of my Health" and his sensitivity to the public criticism of his defense of the British soldiers in 1770, he firmly declined an invitation to give Boston's third Massacre Day oration on 5 March 1773. On the last day of 1772, he began a troubled letter to the Whig historian Catharine Macaulay, in which he confessed:

> The Prospect before me . . . is very gloomy. My Country is in deep Distress, and has very little Ground of Hope, that She will soon, if ever get out of it. The System of a mean, and a merciless Administration, is gaining Ground upon our Patriots every Day. The Flower of our Genius, the Ornaments of the Province, have fallen, melancholly Sacrifices, to the heart piercing Anxieties, which the Measures of Administration have occasioned. A Mayhew, a Thatcher, an Otis to name [no] more, have fallen, the first two by Death, and the last by a Misfortune still much worse, Victims to the Enemies of their Country. The Body of the People seem to be worn out, by struggling, and Venality, Servility, and Prostitution, eat and spread like a Cancer.[3]

This black mood recalls Adams's desolate diary entry of 13 June 1771, but it was even less justified by events in Massachusetts than his earlier pessimism. And for Adams himself, this gloom was astonishingly short-lived. At a private social engagement that very evening, a discussion of the British government's aggressive investigation into the burning of the revenue cutter *Gaspée* in Rhode Island the previous June ignited his volatile emotions like a burning match: "I found the old Warmth, Heat, Violence, Acrimony, Bitterness, Sharpness of my Temper and Expression, was not departed. I said there was no more Justice left in Britain than there was in Hell—That I wished for War." He promptly reproached himself for his outburst in his diary, but the next day, 1 January 1773, again in his diary, he remarked, "I have felt very well and been in good Spirits all Day. I never was happier, in my whole Life, than I have been since I returned to Boston."[4]

While John Adams was inwardly struggling over his response to Massachusetts's desperate situation, his cousin Samuel was neither discouraged nor idle. In early November 1772, he secured the approval of Boston's Town Meeting to create a "committee of correspondence" to communicate the town's alarm at Britain's recent policies. The committee quickly prepared a substantial document, which the town approved for publication in its *Votes and Proceedings* on 20 November. This declaration protested a long list of British offenses, but it centered on the ministry's recent decisions to extend the salaries granted in the Crown's annual civil list to Massachusetts's governor and then to its judges. Boston's committee promptly sent the published pamphlet to each town in the province and invited its reactions to this latest assault on American liberties. The response was overwhelming. Through the winter and into early spring, well over one hundred towns passed supporting resolves against the new imperial policies, while only a handful of communities rejected Boston's argument. But in several of the larger towns sharp battles preceded each decision, and one of these occurred in Cambridge. This local conflict soon placed John Adams back at the center of public life in Massachusetts.[5]

When Cambridge opened its meeting on 14 December, one of its most prominent citizens, General William Brattle, secured the post of moderator, and to the astonishment of his neighbors, who had considered him a firm Whig, he moved to delay any response to Boston's appeal. Massachusetts, he argued, need have no concern over the Crown's paying the judges' salaries because its judges served, and had always served, on a tenure of good behavior and could not be removed at the pleasure of either the governor or the king. When he was challenged on this point, Brattle dared Massachusetts's three leading Whig lawyers, James Otis Jr., Josiah Quincy Jr., and John Adams, to prove him wrong, either in a public meeting or in the press. The Cambridge meeting, however, rejected his call for a delay and supported Boston, whereupon Brattle, stung by his defeat, prepared a defense of his position and placed it in the *Massachusetts Gazette* on 31 December.[6]

Adams could easily have ignored this challenge. The general was unlikely to turn the tide against Boston's appeal for support, and Adams himself would soon be engaged in a larger battle over Britain's imperial policies. But much later, in his autobiography, he remembered taking Brattle's personal challenge personally. He was also concerned that Massachusetts's voters should understand how fragile their liberties would be under judges paid by the Crown. Between 11 January and 22 February 1773, he submitted seven letters to the *Boston Gazette* that quite demolished Brattle's position. Taken together, these essays were John Adams's longest literary production before his *Novanglus* letters of 1775, and among his most learned. Almost clogged up, in some passages, with copious legal citations and several long quotations in Latin, they nevertheless powerfully conveyed truths about the legal and political history of Britain and British North America that Adams's neighbors needed to appreciate if they were to understand the full dimensions of their struggle for equal rights in the British Empire. And, breaking with common custom and his own practice, John Adams, for the first time in his career, signed these essays with his own name.[7]

In claiming that Massachusetts's judges held their offices on good behavior, with no other set limit, General Brattle appealed both to the province's own legal history and to England's venerable common law tradition. In his first letter of response, appearing on 11 January 1773, Adams made short work of Brattle's invocation of Massachusetts law. By citing commissions of office, he easily demonstrated that since the granting of the province's royal charter in 1691, all Massachusetts judicial officials held their offices upon the royal pleasure and could be removed by the monarch at any time. Perhaps Brattle had not clearly understood this because, remarkably, no Massachusetts Superior Court judge had been removed from office, either by a governor or by the British Crown, since 1702. In the ensuing seven decades, most Massachusetts judges had served until their deaths. Their tenures, however, no matter how secure by local tradition, were never secure in law, and Adams called on his countrymen to understand that the independence of their province's judiciary, now to be paid by the Crown, depended for the moment entirely on the goodwill and integrity of a British ministry that had shown neither quality in its dealings with its American colonies.[8]

But he was not content to stop there. Adams felt it was his duty to explain to his countrymen that English judges, too, had never held their posts on good behavior under the common law that he so deeply venerated but had for centuries served solely at the royal pleasure. And in contrast to the happy fate of most judges in Massachusetts, several of England's most eminent high jurists, upon incurring the displeasure of England's more authoritarian monarchs, had been forced off the bench. Shortly after the Glorious Revolution of 1689, however, the standing of English judges improved dramatically. William III and Parliament,

alike concerned to create respect for their new regime, concurred in granting the nation's highest judges the secure tenure, on good behavior, that many Americans apparently assumed they had always enjoyed. Adams began this second argument in his first essay, but he became so interested in the history of judicial tenure in England that he followed it, with occasional returns to Massachusetts, through six more essays into late February, by which time he had thoroughly defeated the hapless General Brattle and probably exhausted the patience of many of his readers.[9]

John Adams's lengthy investigation of the independence—or perhaps better—the dependence of the judges in 1773 does not appear to have immediately altered his ideas about the proper forms and functions of mixed, balanced government. But his appreciation for the political power of the people in their role as jurors, evident in his third "Clarendon" essay in 1766, and again in an incomplete draft that he entered into his diary in 1771, which he may have intended to develop as a newspaper essay, coupled with his concern for the independence of the judiciary in 1773, would come to have a major impact on his political thought by 1776. In that year, in his *Thoughts on Government*, and again in his 1779 draft of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, Adams elevated the judicial branch of government to a position of full equality with the legislative and executive powers that had formed the core of his political thought since the 1760s.[10]

Adams's exploration of the tenure of judges in England also taught him two important political lessons. For the first time in his life he confronted a long-defective and only recently corrected feature of Britain's governmental structure. This forced him to appreciate his beloved British constitution as a dynamic creation, a work in progress. The sacred rights of Englishmen were not timeless and immemorial, created in the obscure era of the Anglo-Saxon kings, but were repeatedly proposed, claimed, explored, defended, suppressed, rediscovered, expanded, and refined. Nor was there any reason to suppose that Britain's constitutional development had finally reached a state of perfection. The next fifteen years would see Adams, along with several of his countrymen, argue that the Americans, through their Revolution, had made real improvements in securing and amplifying the political liberties that the English had always claimed as their own. And in the 1780s he would suggest a few simple measures to improve the British constitution for Britons themselves.[11]

Second, Adams had to confront as well the reality that under the laws of the English (and later British) Parliament, the rights of Englishmen living in the English realm—in this case, the right to justice dispensed by independent judges who served on the secure tenure of good behavior—could in fact be superior to the rights accorded to the descendants of English settlers in the dominion lands of North America. The necessity of this superiority of the rights of the inhabitants of the mother country over those accorded to the colonists

was exactly the lesson that Governor Hutchinson was trying to teach the Massachusetts legislature, and which Adams, as the legislators' legal adviser, was resisting, that same winter. Before that larger controversy had ended, Adams's study of judicial tenure in England and in Massachusetts had already convinced him that his neighbors should know and understand this distinction—and resent it.[12]

2. Two Replies to Governor Hutchinson

John Adams's exchange with General Brattle is quite properly of the highest interest to students of the developing American judicial system. But in the province of Massachusetts Bay in the winter of 1772–73, it was merely a sideshow. The real drama in the rapidly deteriorating relationship between Massachusetts and Great Britain lay in the conflict between the increasingly radicalized towns and their representatives in the provincial legislature, on the one side, and Governor Thomas Hutchinson, on the other. In October 1772, Hutchinson had coolly dismissed the protests of the town of Boston against the new Crown salaries for Superior Court judges. He expected little to come from Samuel Adams's Committee of Correspondence as a vehicle of popular resistance to British rule.[13]

By mid-December, however, the governor was astonished to see town after town not only agreeing with Boston's arguments against Britain's new policies but forming committees of correspondence of their own. At this point, he made the desperate decision to convene and address the legislature. He was convinced that too many representatives, and too many voters in the towns that elected them, simply did not understand, as he well understood, that in any government there could be only one supreme center of authority. In the British Empire, that center must be King-in-Parliament, that powerful fusion of executive and legislative authority which England had perfected in its Glorious Revolution of 1689. On 6 January 1773, Hutchinson delivered his first message to the assembled lawmakers. In the most forthright terms he stated how offensive, unreasonable, and even unconstitutional the recent protests of several towns against British policy had been. He then explained that colonies in an empire must defer to the will of their empire's central authority. The spirited reply of the delegates to this address drew John Adams into the very heart of the imperial conflict, but in a manner that could not have been more different from his concurrent involvement in the controversy with General Brattle.[14]

In any study of John Adams's political thought that depends on a close analysis of his writings, the two replies of the Massachusetts House of Representatives of 26 January and 2 March 1773 to Governor Hutchinson's messages of 6 January and 16 February 1773 present a serious epistemological problem. Adams was unofficially but substantially involved in the construction of these important declarations, but it is impossible to say definitively just how extensive

his involvement was or, with some exceptions, to tie him to specific passages in either text. This dilemma is without precedent in Adams's earlier writings and would not recur again. His role in shaping other major official documents to which he contributed, notably Congress's Declaration of Independence and its Plan of Treaties, both written in 1776, and the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, was very different. In June 1776 he suggested a few modest, well-attested changes to Thomas Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence in committee, and he may have contributed further suggestions as part of the extensive alterations made to the Declaration in Congress's committee of the whole. Immediately thereafter, however, he wrote the entire first draft of the Plan of Treaties before the committee that he chaired, and then the whole Congress, made a few well-documented revisions to create the finished text. And in 1779 he evidently wrote nearly the entire first draft of the Massachusetts Constitution before it underwent any significant changes, most of which were made, and recorded, in the plenary sessions of the state's constitutional convention.[15]

Adams's role, intellectual or literary, in the 1773 replies to Hutchinson is more elusive, so elusive that well into the twentieth century his connection with the legislature's first reply was not widely appreciated, and his contribution to the second was largely unknown. But a few facts are clear. First, Adams was not a member of the House of Representatives in 1773 and thus not a member of either committee appointed to draft its successive replies to the governor. Yet, according to Adams's later recollection, Joseph Hawley, an influential representative from Northampton who was a member of the committee delegated to draft the first reply, insisted that Adams be invited to each of that committee's meetings as a legal consultant. A letter to Adams from his cousin Samuel, a member of both committees, establishes a similar role for John in preparing the second reply.[16]

The logic of this arrangement suggests an authorial involvement by John Adams that ranges from the role of a modest, deferential legal adviser who contributed a few technical revisions to a text drafted by one or more members of each committee, to that of a major draftsman who composed long passages that made the legal case for the legislature's political positions. On the strength of the two replies' rhetorical style and depth of learning, the second scenario seems the more likely. Later Adams remembered that he played a major role in drafting both replies (although he supplied few details), and both the extensive legal-historical nature of the texts and Adams's confident, assertive legal style give weight to his testimony. The analysis that follows assumes that much of the argument in the House's two replies to Hutchinson is Adams's—in a few passages it is demonstrably so—and that the entire text of both replies is compatible with what Adams believed in the winter of 1773.[17]

Before exploring Adams's constitutional thought as embodied in the House of Representative's reply to Governor Hutchinson's message of 6 January 1773,

that message deserves a brief summary to set in context the basic points of the reply. But Hutchinson's message merits careful attention for two additional reasons. First, while it did not introduce any novel ideas, it offered a succinct statement of the constitutional position of America's Tory leaders and writers in the early 1770s. Second, it raised fundamental issues that Adams would address again, at much greater length, in his *Letters of Novanglus* in 1775. The exchange between Hutchinson and Adams in 1773 reached to the core of the constitutional argument that would separate Britain and America in 1776.

Hutchinson opened the substantive argument of his message with the assertion that Massachusetts's first settlers understood that they would remain subject to Parliament while living in North America, that the English Parliament also understood this, and that a reading of the colony's original Charter of 1629 would validate this understanding. To broaden his argument, he claimed that "the most celebrated writers on the law of nations" agreed that colonies remained subject to their mother countries and quoted Emmerich de Vattel to this purpose. Colonial legislatures, the governor continued, stood in the same relationship to Parliament as corporations did in England, even when the lawmakers enjoyed far more extensive powers. Surveying Massachusetts's history, he found these beliefs questioned only twice, in the 1680s during the political chaos preceding the Glorious Revolution, and "within the seven or eight years past," that is, since the Stamp Act crisis of 1765. He then argued that the Charter of 1691 gave Massachusetts's legislature the right to make only such laws "as are not repugnant, to the laws of England"; that the Charter's grant of liberties and immunities was only intended to ensure the colonists that they would not become aliens from the Crown; and that it was impossible for all English subjects to have the same rights everywhere. One right they necessarily surrendered, by their choice to emigrate to America, was representation in Parliament. The governor concluded by declaring his view of the central issue: "I know of no line that can be drawn between the supreme authority of Parliament and the total independence of the colonies: it is impossible there should be two independent Legislatures in one and the same state; for, although there may be but one head, the King, yet the two Legislative bodies will make two governments as distinct as the kingdoms of England and Scotland before the union [of 1707]."[18]

The House opened its reply by rejecting the governor's assertion that the people of Massachusetts, assembled in their town meetings, had done anything unconstitutional by protesting the grievances they were enduring under British rule and argued that the "very disturbed State" that the governor saw in the province arose not from these entirely proper gatherings but from Parliament's own attempts to exercise unconstitutional power through its Stamp Act, Declaratory Act, and Townshend revenue duties. It then turned to the substance of Hutchinson's argument, at which point the text, nearly to its conclusion, shows unmistakable signs of John Adams's legal learning and style of argument.[19]

The body of the legislature's reply is an extended rejection of Hutchinson's first major argument: that Massachusetts's earliest settlers understood they would remain subject to Parliament while living in America; that the seventeenth-century English political nation also understood this; and that the Charter of 1629 explicitly showed this understanding. Adams could have proceeded directly to quotations to refute each point, but he decided instead to cast his counterargument more broadly. He began by reviewing the political intentions of the earliest English settlers in North America and their rulers in England and then introduced a distinction and a definition that would become central pillars of his treatment of America's rights within the British Empire until Independence. The distinction, which Hutchinson never acknowledged, was between English (later British) dominions and the English (later British) realm. The definition advanced a broad interpretation of a central principle of English and then British colonial government that appeared in virtually every colonial charter and in every set of instructions to royal governors: that colonial legislatures must not make laws that were "repugnant to the laws of England."[20]

The first Massachusetts charter, and all English colonial charters, Adams argued, granted to specified subjects the right to settle and to govern themselves, according to an explicitly expressed design, in designated areas of the king's American dominions, lands acquired by the monarch through discovery or conquest, and never brought under the control of Parliament. The right to dispose of land in America "in the Opinion of those Times vested solely in the Crown." To prove this point, he appealed to exchanges between Kings James I and Charles I and their Parliaments that acknowledged the Crown's exclusive control over its American dominions. He also cited a statute drafted by Charles II's ministers that granted a permanent revenue to Virginia's governor, which the king sent to Virginia's House of Burgesses for passage, as proof that the king recognized the exclusive right of a colonial legislature to levy taxes within the lands assigned to its control by the monarch.[21]

Of perhaps equal importance was Adams's parsing of the phrase "laws not repugnant to the laws of England." He denied that such language could be used to justify parliamentary sovereignty; colonial laws repugnant to those of England were clearly prohibited, but it did not follow that any and all English laws, and the Parliament that passed them, were automatically superior to all colonial laws and the assemblies that framed them. But Adams pushed the phrase further. The true meaning of these clauses in all colonial charters, he declared, was not simply to disallow laws that conflicted with some particular English law but to ensure that "the Laws of the Colonies should be as much as possible, conformant in the Spirit of them to the Principles and fundamental Laws of the English Constitution, its Rights and Statutes then in Being." Because "the Principles and fundamental Laws of the English Constitution" began with a royal statute issued under Henry III (9 H 3, chap. 29), known to every common law

lawyer in Britain and America as the Great Charter of 1225 (the operative version of its predecessor, Magna Carta), this definition put the imperial relationship squarely on grounds that supported an irreducible minimum body of rights for all Englishmen, and for all other English (and later British) subjects, living in America.[22]

Having advanced these points, Adams produced a host of citations to demonstrate that Massachusetts's first settlers had never agreed to parliamentary sovereignty, and that Parliament had not sought it. He did concede that beginning in the late seventeenth century, Parliament began playing a more assertive role in colonial life, and he even admitted that at certain unspecified points in the eighteenth century the Massachusetts legislature had quietly submitted to acts of Parliament "rather from Inconsideration or a Reluctance at the Idea of contending with the Parent State, than from a Conviction or Acknowledgement of the Supreme Legislative Authority of Parliament." But Adams hardly thought this invalidated his larger argument, and having shown, to his own satisfaction, how wrongheaded the governor was about the constitutional traditions of a province whose own history he (the governor) had written—and which Adams quoted several times against him—he finally turned to Hutchinson's remarks about the present crisis.[23]

Responding to the governor's statement that he knew of no line that could be drawn between submission to Parliament and total independence, Adams agreed, but reasoned further:

> If there be no such Line, the Consequence is, either that the Colonies are the Vassals of the Parliament, or, that they are totally independent. As it cannot be supposed to have been the Intention of the Parties in the Compact [i.e., the Charter of 1629], that we should be reduced to a State of Vassallage, the Conclusion is, that it was their Sense, that we were thus Independent. "It is impossible, your Excellency says, that there should be two independent Legislatures in one and the same State." May we not then further conclude, that it was their Sense that the Colonies were by their Charters made distinct States from the Mother Country? Your Excellency adds, "For although there may be but one Head, the King, yet the two Legislative Bodies will make two Governments as distinct as the Kingdoms of England and Scotland before the Union." Very true, may it please your Excellency; and if they interfere not with each other, what hinders but that being united in one Head and common Sovereign, they may live happily in that Connection and mutually support and protect each other?[24]

The legislators then rejected Hutchinson's attempt to intimidate them by his prediction that if the colonists did achieve independence from Great Britain, they would soon be reduced by foreign conquest to experiencing the far more restricted liberties of the French, Spanish, or Dutch colonies. The governor

should have anticipated their reply, that under the British Parliament's harsh new rule, they already had a foretaste of life under those imperious regimes. Their parting shot, however, was more ominous: "If your Excellency expects to have the Line of Distinction between the Supreme Authority of Parliament, and the total Independence of the Colonies drawn by us, we would say it would be an arduous Undertaking; and of very great Importance to all the other Colonies: And therefore, could we conceive of such a Line, we should be unwilling to propose it, without their Consent in Congress."[25]

Governor Hutchinson hesitated for some time before deciding to answer the assembly's response, and both his second message, of 16 February, and the legislators' reply, of 2 March, were more legalistic than his first message and their first reply. This perhaps owed partly to Hutchinson's decision to concentrate on a few specific historical claims in the assembly's response, while largely ignoring the thrust of its larger argument. But the governor's discussion of legal technicalities gave John Adams, in the legislators' second response, the perfect opportunity to develop a fuller historical defense of the distinction between dominions and the realm that he had advanced in January.

The legislature first countered Hutchinson's new claim that the king held all of Massachusetts in a feudal relationship, which made it part of the English realm and therefore subject to Parliament. Feudalism and its legal legacy had been home territory to Adams since he wrote his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* in 1765, and he pressed his advantage at once. After first asking Hutchinson if he really wished to revive England's feudal past, he asserted that under a strictly feudal relationship, the king's control of his dominion lands was absolute and admitted of no role for Parliament. The king could acquire territories in his own name through discovery, conquest, or treaty and could freely dispose of them by grants and charters, or again by treaties, even if the land so disposed had been acquired by a war "carried on at the Charge of the Nation." (This last observation may have been directed at British imperial policy under King George II and his advisers, who had returned the great fortress of Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island, captured by New Englanders in 1745, to France in the Treaty of Aix la Chapelle [1748], an act still bitterly remembered in Massachusetts.)[26]

The argument then shifted to the presentation of a host of citations from various sources, all to show the distinction between dominion lands and national realms, and to validate a monarch's right to establish separate commonwealths on dominion lands. Adams quoted a line from the prominent seventeenth-century member of Parliament, Sir Edwin Sandys: "The Law of Nations is or ought to be founded on the Law of Reason." Then he cited two early theorists of the law of nations, Samuel Pufendorf and Hugo Grotius, in support of a monarch's power to create new governments. He next turned to Lord Chief Justice Edward Coke, whose celebrated decision in *Calvin's Case*

(1608) untangled some of the legal issues that arose when the separate kingdoms of England and Scotland came under the rule of the same monarch (James I, in 1603), ruling that the king's subjects could owe allegiance to his person from lands that he ruled outside England, without reference to the allegiance owed him by his English subjects under English common law within the English realm. In a bit of daring, Adams also claimed that the original settlers of Massachusetts held a title to their American lands by purchase from native peoples that was superior even to the king's title, with the implication that they freely chose to pledge their allegiance to him (and not to Parliament). He followed with a denial that a set of events and declarations in London and Boston between the 1660s and the 1740s constituted any acknowledgment of parliamentary supremacy by the legislature or the people of Massachusetts.[27]

Adams concluded the legislature's second response to the governor with two related arguments. First, he repeated, with greater force, his assertion in the assembly's first reply that the Charter's requirement that the Massachusetts legislature make no law repugnant to the laws of England obligated it to observe, first and foremost, not recent parliamentary statutes but the fundamental laws of England that originated in the thirteenth century. He then returned to a quotation that he had used in the legislature's first response to Hutchinson, but now employed it to greater effect. This was Emmerich de Vattel's declaration that "the Authority of the Legislature does not extend so far as the Fundamentals of the Constitution." Adams used this dictum to defend the proposition that the House of Representatives could not submit to the supreme authority of Parliament, as Hutchinson demanded, because it had not been authorized by the people of Massachusetts to do so. To pass any law or resolve of submission, and thereby alter the fundamental laws under which Massachusetts operated, would be to assume an authority that was repugnant to the fundamental laws of England. In advancing this thesis, Adams was also implying that Parliament itself could pass no law, such as the Stamp Act or the Declaratory Act, which was repugnant to the fundamental laws of England. After quoting Richard Hooker and John Locke to the effect that laws only gained their true force by the consent of the governed, he concluded: "We think your Excellency has not proved, either that the Colony is a Part of the politick Society of England, or that it has ever consented that the Parliament of England or Great-Britain should make Laws binding upon us in all Cases whatever, whether made expressly to refer to us or not."[28]

As an intellectual confrontation, the legislature's—and John Adams's—duel with Thomas Hutchinson, unlike Adams's duel with General Brattle, had no clear winner. Both Tories and Patriots clung tenaciously to their respective views of the British constitution and its relationship to Britain's North American colonies up to American Independence, and neither Hutchinson nor the legislature made many converts in this debate. But the political battle was a di-

saster for Hutchinson, both in Massachusetts, where any lingering popular support for the governor, still evident in 1771 and 1772, soon expired, and in London, where the British ministry was appalled by his foolhardy invitation to the legislature to engage in a candid exchange of views on the constitutional basis of Britain's empire.[29]

For Adams, however, his role in drafting the legislature's replies was a political triumph. He immediately became an indispensable resource for the Patriot leadership in the House of Representatives, which soon concluded that he could mount a sounder defense of their ideological convictions than any other man in the province. In February 1774 he would reinforce their confidence by persuading the assembly to impeach the province's chief justice, Peter Oliver, for preferring the financial support of the British Crown to that of the people of Massachusetts. Adams's election to the First Continental Congress in June 1774 was a natural outgrowth of his services to the lawmakers, and at the Congress he played a prominent role in framing the statement of the colonies' autonomous powers within the British Empire.

Adams's intellectual achievement in his replies to Hutchinson, however, was an even greater triumph than his political advancement. As late as the fall of 1772, he showed signs of being mired in a dilemma. He was convinced that he understood how the British constitution should ensure the people's liberty and had powerfully expressed this conviction in his third "Clarendon" essay of 1766. He believed he understood the essential nature of republican government and had thoroughly explored this understanding in his oration at Braintree in the spring of 1772. But he had not developed a historical basis for preferring the predominant colonial view of the British constitution to the reigning British imperial view, nor had he begun to integrate ideas from the writings of British republican theorists into his conception of the British constitution. In the winter of 1773, he began to do both.

In countering Hutchinson's view of the British Empire, Adams advanced three general propositions. First, British dominions, including Scotland, Ireland, and all overseas colonies, were and had always been distinct from the English realm unless they were explicitly united with or incorporated in it (as Scotland was in 1707). The king could grant the right of settlement in any dominion lands that had not been incorporated in that realm to any person or persons and could authorize the creation of new governments with fundamental powers in these lands. And the settlers in these dominions could express their allegiance to the person of the monarch, without acknowledging any authority of either the laws or the Parliament of the English realm.

Second, the British constitution comprised both specific parliamentary statutes and court decisions passed or issued to deal with particular problems—such as the Navigation Acts—and more fundamental laws and court decisions, the earliest predating England's first Parliament, which defined both the essential

rights of Englishmen and the respective powers of the king, the Parliament, and all other British political institutions. When colonial legislatures were enjoined from passing any laws "repugnant to the laws of England," it was these fundamental laws that deserved their greatest respect.

Third, building on Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, as quoted in John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, Adams declared that all laws drew their essential authority from the consent of the governed and could not be enforced without that consent.[30] This meant, first, that colonial legislatures could not pass any laws that impinged on their constituents' fundamental rights—as an acknowledgment of the supreme authority of the British Parliament would do—without their constituents' explicit consent. It also meant that the British Parliament could pass no valid law that impinged on the fundamental rights of the people in Britain's colonies, who were not represented in Parliament, without their express consent. (This reasoning also implied that no legislature of a free government, including the British Parliament, could pass valid laws that impinged on the fundamental rights of its own people without their express consent. But this last extension of the American position would only be fully developed in and after 1776, with the construction of binding written constitutions, typically with introductory or appended bills of rights, as a limitation on the powers of legislatures in the newly independent states, and eventually on the powers of the U.S. Congress.)

From a broad historical perspective, Thomas Hutchinson and John Adams were advocating for two contrasting views of the British constitution that had emerged over the previous two centuries. Hutchinson defended a tightly united British Empire, directed from its center by King-in-Parliament, a fusion of the supreme executive and legislative branches of the government, which had emerged from the Glorious Revolution of 1689, a view that received its most recent endorsement in William Blackstone's celebrated *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–69). In this system, all other political entities, be they overseas colonies or domestic municipal corporations, civil or military governors, or local legislatures, however chosen, were strictly subordinate to the central authority. Adams was defending the initially decentralized, developing British Empire that began early in the seventeenth century, which was, in the common view of British North Americans, still growing and changing well over a century later. In this system, the only institutional center was its first center, the monarch. He established and presided over a plethora of dominions, mostly beyond the British Isles, each with its own political traditions and institutions. The one thing common to them all, beyond the king himself, was the body of fundamental laws of England, which served as a standard of rights and legislation for every colony, regardless of its organization.[31]

In making their respective arguments, Hutchinson and Adams—and the contemporary and subsequent commentators who adhered to the argument of

the one or the other—each conveniently forgot certain historical events and developments but remembered others forgotten by his opponent. Thomas Hutchinson forgot the seventeenth-century world of dominions and colonies, of the king's contrasting roles in the realm and outside it, and of contractual relationships, like those embodied in the colonial charters, that were regarded by their recipients, and by their recipients' descendants, as inviolable covenants. John Adams forgot or ignored the fundamental achievement of the Glorious Revolution and its aftermath in England, the unification of the monarch and the legislature into one indivisible institution of government. The contestants were defending two different histories, one of British North America, the other of Britain itself.

Within British North America, however, there developed two broad, overlapping approaches to rejecting parliamentary supremacy. Richard Bland, in *An Enquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies* (1766), pioneered the first approach, asserting that in passing legislation for people whom it did not represent, Parliament was violating natural law. This argument, which employed the language of John Locke, had broad appeal in the American colonies, most of which lacked a corporate charter and, in some cases, were founded late in the seventeenth or even in the eighteenth century, during and after the great increase in the power of Parliament in the mid- and late seventeenth century. But Bland in 1766, like Adams in 1773, did distinguish between the realm of England and the king's dominions in making his case. His emphasis on the colonies' lack of representation in Parliament, which plays a relatively minor role in Adams's argument of 1773, would soon be endorsed by James Wilson in his *Considerations on the Authority of Parliament*, an essay drafted in 1768 but not published until 1774.[32]

The dominion approach, which dominated substantial sections of Adams's exchanges with Hutchinson in 1773, had special appeal to those few colonies with corporate charters or, in the sole case of Massachusetts, with a royal charter that was in effect a modified corporate charter. But Adams did not simply rely on particular charters to guarantee the rights of any colony. Instead, by developing at much greater length Bland's original distinction between royal dominions and the realm of England, he could mount a defense of the right of any British colony to a measure of autonomy.

When twentieth-century historians and political scientists began a close study of the texts of the American Revolution, John Adams's use of this argument appeared central to America's claim to autonomy within the British Empire. His *Letters of Novanglus* (1775) placed Adams in the vanguard of what might be called "dominion thought." But because his role in drafting the Massachusetts assembly's two replies to Hutchinson was largely unknown until the publication of the modern Adams Papers edition in the 1960s and 1970s, scholars underestimated the scope of his contribution to the American colonies' claim to autonomy through their dominion origin. Before this time, the leading

scholar of the American argument for the colonies' autonomy as a legacy of their status as seventeenth-century English dominions, Charles McIlwain, greatly admired the Massachusetts House of Representative's reply to Hutchinson's second message and clearly saw its similarity to both the fourth resolve of the First Continental Congress's Declaration of Rights and Grievances, which he knew was John Adams's work, and Adams's *Letters of Novanglus*, but he would nevertheless tentatively attribute the legislature's second reply to the governor to Samuel, not John, Adams.[33]

The Massachusetts House of Representatives—and its theorist and draftsman, John Adams—cast the two replies to Governor Hutchinson largely in language that was appropriate to a constitutional monarchy and was limited to the English-speaking world, but not entirely. Both Hutchinson and Adams referred to Emmerich de Vattel, to whom Adams added Grotius and Pufendorf. His use of those continental writers on international law, and his late quotation of John Locke, suggested a broader horizon, one not bounded by a British monarch or any particular form of executive. And in September 1774, in committee at the First Continental Congress, he would endorse natural law, not charter rights or even the British constitution, as the ultimate foundation of colonial rights. The constitutional polity that John Adams was defending in 1773 was not a republic in name, and he did not think that it was a republic. But by arguing, especially in the legislature's second reply to Hutchinson, that only consent could give laws their authority, and that the fundamental English rights of representation and civil protection were superior to all other laws, from whatever source, he was moving toward the distinctive concept of a republic that he would soon perceive in Britain itself, and would soon experience in Massachusetts.

3. Massachusetts's Revolutionary Crisis

By March 1773, Adams's encounter with General Brattle and his legal service to the House of Representatives in its duel with Governor Hutchinson had drawn him back into politics. His intellectual and emotional commitment to both controversies finally removed most of his doubts that he should become more engaged in his country's struggle with Britain. And the mere fact of his renewed Patriot activity, evident to the broader public in the case of Brattle, and to the leadership of the legislature in the case of Hutchinson, would have made it difficult for him to retire again to his legal office.

But Adams made little attempt to avoid political involvement in the spring of 1773. In late March he was shown, in strictest confidence, a packet of private letters that had been written by Thomas Hutchinson and several other Tory leaders in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York to the influential government figure Thomas Whatley in England in the late 1760s. In the fall of 1772, following Whatley's death, Benjamin Franklin, who served as the London agent of Massachusetts's House of Representatives, had somehow

secured this material, which contained sentiments that Patriots considered destructive to the liberties of America. He promptly sent the letters to the Speaker of the Massachusetts House, Thomas Cushing, who began showing them to select Patriot leaders, including John Adams. At least some of these men revealed the letters' existence and contents to other influential men, as Adams did to Norton Quincy and the Reverend Anthony Wibird in Braintree in April. Although secrecy was still enjoined, the House decided in June that the contents of the letters were so widely known that it would be best to publish them so the people of Massachusetts could see what their governor really thought of their rights.[34]

In late May 1773, as the letters were still quietly circulating, the newly elected Massachusetts legislature held its annual nomination of a new Council. Adams was anxious because Hutchinson's friends and supporters had done well at the recent polls, while the Patriots, still pledged to secrecy, could not reveal the correspondence that would damage the governor's reputation. But on the eve of the balloting, echoing his soul-searching in January 1768, he fretted in his diary: "What will be expected of me? What will be required of me? What Duties and Obligations will result to me, from an Election? What Duties to my God, my King, my Country, my Friends, my Family, myself?" He then resolved: "If I should be called in the Course of Providence to take a Part in public Life, I shall Act a fearless, intrepid, undaunted Part, at all Hazards—tho it shall be my Endeavour likewise to act a prudent, cautious and considerate Part." After contemplating the possibility—which appeared by no means entirely unpleasing—that he would not be called on to serve, he declared: "But I was not sent into this World to spend my days in Sports, Diversions and Pleasures. I was born for Business; for both Activity and Study. I have little Appetite, or Relish for any Thing else."[35]

The following day, 26 May, the new General Court nominated John Adams, along with twenty-seven others, to the Council. Governor Hutchinson promptly rejected Adams and two other nominees. The governor's veto gave Adams, who had not been elected or sought election to the lower house, one more year of private life. But his return to the public stage was now virtually assured. In nominating him to the Council, Massachusetts's Patriot leaders had recognized him as one of their own and marked him for a more prominent public role. For his part, Adams stayed involved in the imperial controversy but tried to keep out of public view. In July, he conferred with a Patriot in Rhode Island who sought advice on the "libelous" sentiments made by an author of the secret letters in that colony, and he drafted a brief attack on Hutchinson over the signature of the Boston Massacre martyr, "Crispus Attucks," but decided not to submit it to the press. Yet he remained much in the public eye, and only the course of the increasingly troubled relationship between Massachusetts and Great Britain would determine when he would finally reenter public service.[36]

In London, British officials had treated North America rather gingerly since the beginning of Lord North's ministry in 1770 and had tried to respond coolly to challenges to its authority in Massachusetts, in South Carolina, and particularly in Rhode Island, where angry colonists had burned the British revenue cutter *Gaspée* in June 1772. But in May 1773, whether due to insensitivity to America's continuing objection to any imperial taxation, or to an inability to imagine the effect of a new commercial arrangement that promised cheaper tea, but at the price of both antagonizing local merchants and threatening a more effective collection of the widely hated Townshend tea tax, Parliament passed a new Tea Act. This measure, designed simply to assist the ailing East India Company by allowing it to sell its swollen inventory of tea directly to America, quickly set up confrontations between tea agents and suspicious colonists in several American ports. In one port, Boston, the confrontation turned into a collision as Governor Thomas Hutchinson determined to land the tea, and the Patriots determined with equal resolve to repel it. On 16 December, some two hundred colonists thinly disguised as Mohawk Indians, acting before a crowd of thousands of excited spectators, threw £9,000 worth of tea into Boston Harbor.[37]

John Adams, who the previous May had determined to act "a prudent, cautious and considerate Part" in public life, had not a moment's hesitation in warmly approving this massive destruction of property and avidly welcomed the consequences, whatever they might be. Turning to his diary the following day, he confided: "This is the most magnificent Movement of all. There is a Dignity, a Majesty, a Sublimity, in this last Effort of the Patriots, that I greatly admire. The People should never rise, without doing something to be remembered—something notable And striking. This destruction of the Tea is so bold, so daring, so firm, intrepid and inflexible, and it must have so important Consequences, and so lasting, that I cant but consider it as an Epocha in History." That same 17 December, he wrote to his friend James Warren:

> The Dye is cast: The People have passed the River and cutt away the Bridge: Last Night Three Cargoes of Tea, were emptied into the Harbour. This is the grandest Event, which has ever yet happened Since, the Controversy, with Britain, opened!
>
> The Sublimity of it, charms me![38]

The cool, moderate defender of colonial rights had again become the hot radical Patriot of the previous New Year's Eve, when he had sworn there was "no more Justice left in Britain than there was in Hell" and even "wished for War." John Adams would have at least two more moments of inner hesitation, first in May, and then in June 1774, when he pondered whether America had the capacity to resist the might of Great Britain.[39] But some experience—whether it was repeated evidences of a British conspiracy against American liberties that

he saw as clearly as any radical Patriot, or the period of intense anxiety and doubt he suffered from 1768 through 1771, or perhaps the final treachery of British policy that he saw in the Hutchinson letters that circulated in 1773—had finally hardened his will and fired his spirit. His temper, from December 1773 until the conclusion of the War for Independence, remained ardently patriotic.

The first five months of 1774 must have been as suspenseful for Adams as they were for his Boston neighbors. How would Britain react to the destruction of the tea? How would Bostonians respond to Britain's reaction? Again, as often before, Adams largely neglected his diary for several months and wrote few letters, leaving the substance of his inner thoughts to the realm of speculation. But his winter and spring were hardly idle. His practice continued to flourish, he prepared a detailed legal study of Massachusetts's boundaries with New Hampshire and New York for the legislature, and he served informally as counsel to the House as it prepared to impeach Chief Justice Peter Oliver, the only Superior Court judge who had not agreed to renounce the royal salary provided by the Crown since 1772.[40]

The Massachusetts House of Representatives' Articles of Impeachment against Peter Oliver, passed on 24 February 1774, can hardly compare, either as a defiant declaration of its autonomy from the British ministry and Parliament or as a statement of John Adams's constitutional thought, with its spirited replies to Governor Hutchinson the previous winter (to which, however, the articles are quite closely related). But in his autobiography, Adams took greater pleasure in remembering his role in the impeachment. Perhaps this was because, as he recalled the controversy, the legislators would never have impeached Oliver without his encouragement and guidance. Possibly, too, he felt that while the legislature's replies of 1773 played an important role—although perhaps a lesser role than the subsequent revelation of Hutchinson's private correspondence with Thomas Whatley—in eventually undermining the governor's authority, the impeachment of Oliver led, in less than two months, to his rejection by grand jurors and the public in the provincial courts. In his retrospective account of the issue, Adams stated that he coached several legislators, especially the influential Joseph Hawley, pretty closely as they framed their argument. If his memory was accurate, the Articles of Impeachment against Peter Oliver is a significant expression of John Adams's constitutional thought in 1774.[41]

The articles state clearly the House of Representative's reason for impeaching the chief justice—his public refusal to renounce his Crown salary, offered in 1772, and his determination to reject his salary from the legislature, which he had accepted up to that year. The document's constitutional importance, however, lies in its justification of the assembly's powers to impeach a civil officer. It opened with the statement that the Charter of 1691 had granted to Massachusetts residents "all Liberties and Immunities of free and natural Subjects within any of the [English monarchs'] Dominions . . . as if they . . . were born within

the Realm of England." To implement these rights, the Charter had granted to the provincial legislature, which it had created, the "full Power and Authority to erect and constitute Judicatories and Courts of Record," and to levy taxes in "Support of his Majesty's Government of the Province," so that the inhabitants "might always have and enjoy that essential Privilege of the English Constitution, of supporting the executive and judicial Officers in the Government of this Province by THE FREE GRANTS OF THE PEOPLE."[42]

Judge Oliver, the articles continued, knowing full well the legislature's purpose in creating of the Superior Court of Judicature, to deliver impartial justice to the public, chose by rejecting the legislature's salary "to introduce into the said Court a partial, arbitrary, and corrupt Administration of Justice." Further, by accepting a Crown salary that was supplied from "Revenue unjustly levied and extorted from the Inhabitants of the American Colonies" (the customs duties on molasses, sugar, and tea), he had "put a Sanction on and established the said Revenue." For these offenses, "this House of Representatives, in their own Name, and in the Name of all the Inhabitants of this Province," impeached Oliver by a vote of 92 to 8, and prepared to carry the bill of impeachment to the governor and the Council.[43]

In a few short pages, the Massachusetts House of Representatives, building on the arguments it had advanced in its debate with Governor Hutchinson the previous winter, made three explicit claims. First, the inhabitants of Massachusetts, under the Charter of 1691, enjoyed all the rights "of free and natural Subjects within any of the Dominions" of England's monarchs "as if they and every of them were born within the Realm of England." Second, both the General Court (the Massachusetts's legislature) and the Superior Court of Judicature were created, under the explicit terms of the Charter, to deliver those rights to the inhabitants. Third, the legislature had the exclusive right to pay the judges, in order to protect "that essential Privilege of the English Constitution," supporting the executive and judicial officers in the government "by THE FREE GRANTS OF THE PEOPLE," and any attempt to pay them from another source must "introduce into the said Court a partial, arbitrary and corrupt Administration of Justice."

Left unstated in the Articles of Impeachment (and without any explicit basis in the Charter of 1691), but readily apparent to any discerning reader, was the legislature's claim to a right of impeachment that was fully equal to that of the British Parliament. This audacious presumption, however, followed naturally from what the articles did say: that the inhabitants of Massachusetts enjoyed all the rights of Englishmen in England; that the Massachusetts legislature enjoyed all the powers to create political institutions and pay government officials enjoyed by the British Parliament; and that Massachusetts's courts were, within their jurisdiction, fully equal to any court in England, and deserved the same respect from legislatures and executive authorities. And, of course, there was the

unstated history of impeachment in England, which Parliament had used from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century to remove several of the nation's highest officers (and, before the Glorious Revolution, as a prelude to executing some of them). Governor Hutchinson was outraged at the legislators' presumption and flatly denied that they possessed this power, but he soon discovered that the Council, now firmly under the control of the Patriots, was eager to hear the Articles of Impeachment, and he could only protect Judge Oliver—from the legislature, but not from angry grand jurors—by refusing to convene the upper chamber.[44]

On 28 February, Adams took a brief break from both politics and the law to record in his diary the purchase, from his brother Peter Boylston Adams, of "my fathers Homestead, and House where I was born. The House, Barn and thirty five acres of Land of which the Homestead consists, and Eighteen acres of Pasture in the North Common, cost me £440." This acquisition of his birthplace and the surrounding acres was characteristic of his slow but steady accumulation of property in Braintree, extending from his paternal inheritance in 1761 to the last decades of his life. It would soon offer a substantial place of refuge from occupied Boston and a larger rural income for his family during the long years he would be away on national service in Philadelphia, Paris, and Holland. Whether he suspected in February 1774 that his family might soon need this refuge is unknown, but he would not be kept in suspense much longer.[45]

In March, Parliament passed the Boston Port Act, which closed the harbor to all commerce from 1 June until the city had paid the East India Company for the tea destroyed in December, and the ministry decided to replace Governor Thomas Hutchinson, who had expressed a strong wish to retire, and whose effectiveness had been thoroughly undermined both by his own missteps (his addresses to the Massachusetts House in the winter of 1773) and by misfortune (the publication of his private letters to England the following summer), with General Thomas Gage, the commander of all British forces in North America. Gage reached Boston on 13 May; an army of occupation would begin to arrive in early August. The annual election of a new House of Representatives also fell in May, but when the full legislature convened and chose the new Council of twenty-eight members, again including John Adams, Gage did not negative just three men, as Hutchinson had done the previous spring, but thirteen (including Adams), and promptly prorogued the legislature, to meet in Salem in June. As the Port of Boston closed, a harsh new provincial regime had begun, but worse was soon to come.[46]

By early spring the British ministry determined to bring the entire province of Massachusetts under much firmer control from Westminster than ever before, and in May and early June Parliament passed three new laws to that end. The Administration of Justice Act (quickly dubbed the "Murder Act" by American Patriots) provided that the governor of Massachusetts could transfer

any magistrate or customs officer charged with a crime in the performance of his duties to another colony or to Britain for trial. A new Quartering Act, which applied to all the colonies, allowed British governors and military commanders to house troops that had been assigned to control civilian populations, and for whom there were no established barracks or large empty structures, virtually anywhere in the communities they patrolled.[47]

The most important new law, however, was the Massachusetts Government Act (10 May 1774). This statute altered several key provisions of the Massachusetts Charter of 1691. First, the heretofore nominated Council of twenty-eight members would become a true royal governor's council, with its size and membership determined in Britain; its members, the new "mandamus" councilors, would no longer serve for one-year terms, but strictly at the pleasure of the Crown. Second, a host of lower court judges and clerks, some of whom had been elected to their offices, would all be appointed at the royal pleasure and could be removed by the governor at will. Third, the governor would appoint the county sheriffs, who had also been elected. Fourth, these new sheriffs would supervise the selection of jurors, which had formerly been under local control. Finally, the town meetings, which had always enjoyed the power to convene and adjourn at will, were restricted to annual meetings to select officers and conduct routine business and were required to secure the governor's written permission for any additional gatherings and for any expansion of their agenda. In one swift measure, Britain had unilaterally curtailed the rights and powers of the quasi-republican province of Massachusetts and its some two hundred local democracies, which John Adams had praised so highly at Braintree in 1772.[48]

When the first news of the Administration of Justice and the Massachusetts Government acts reached Boston on 2 June, the town's Patriot leadership had already marshaled opposition to the Boston Port Act in two town meetings and was preparing for another mass gathering of the kind that John Adams had assiduously avoided in the late 1760s. On 17 June 1774, however, he unexpectedly found himself the moderator of just such an event when other local leaders were either in Salem serving in the legislature or occupied in other business. On that same day in Salem, in its last official act, the last House of Representatives convened under royal authority closed its doors against the messenger that Governor Gage had sent to dismiss the defiant lawmakers and chose five men—"the Hon. James Bowdoin, Esq; the Hon. Thomas Cushing, Esq; Mr. Samuel Adams; John Adams, Esq; and Robert Treat Paine, Esq."—to represent the province in a Continental Congress that would convene in Philadelphia in September.[49]

As he headed north from Boston on his last circuit riding to Maine, Adams began to ponder the full implications of what his countrymen, both in Massachusetts and far to the south, had just done in calling for a congress, and what he had just done in accepting the appointment to attend it. He did not hesitate

to meet his new obligation, but confiding to his diary on 20 June, he was not exactly sanguine at the prospect:

> There is a new, and a grand Scene open before me—a Congress.
>
> This will be an assembly of the wisest Men upon the Continent, who are Americans in Principle, i.e. against the Taxation of Americans, by Authority of Parliament.
>
> I feel myself unequal to this Business. A more extensive Knowledge of the Realm, the Colonies, and of Commerce, as well as of Law and Policy, is necessary, than I am Master of.
>
> What can be done? Will it be expedient to propose an Annual Congress of Committees? To Petition.—Will it do to petition at all?

Then, remembering the historic importance of the venture, whatever its prospects, he concluded the entry: "I will keep an exact Diary, of my Journey, as well as a Journal of the Proceedings of the Congress." Five days later, at Ipswich, he used an adjournment of the Essex Superior Court to take a long walk:

> I wander alone, and ponder.—I muse, I mope, I ruminate.—I am often In Reveries and Brown Studies.—The Objects before me, are too grand, and multifarious for my Comprehension.—We have not Men, fit for the Times. We are deficient in Genius, in Education, in Travel, in Fortune—in every Thing. I feel unutterable Anxiety.—God grant us Wisdom, and Fortitude!
>
> Should the Opposition be suppressed, should this Country submit, what Infamy and Ruin! God forbid. Death in any Form is less terrible.

John Adams's national career had begun.[50]

4. To the First Continental Congress

Before considering John Adams's service in the First Continental Congress and the impact of that service on his political thought, one should first ask why the Massachusetts House chose him for this role. Three of his colleagues, Samuel Adams, Thomas Cushing, and James Bowdoin, had been prominent Patriots in the House (and, in Bowdoin's case, on the Council as well) for more than a decade and were obvious choices. Both Paine and John Adams, the youngest of the five, did bring to the delegation a legal expertise that was expected to be of value in defending America's rights.[51] And Adams had been a well-known and respected Patriot in Boston since 1770, as his election to the House in a by-election that year, an invitation (declined) to deliver the Massacre oration in 1773, and his selection as moderator of the 17 June 1774 town meeting amply prove. But John Adams's winning qualifications for Congress were probably more specific and were of a nature that lies at the center of the principal role that he would play in Philadelphia, even more in the Second Congress than in the First.

The colonial John Adams has long been celebrated among popular historians, biographers, and academic scholars alike in two roles: as an effective essayist, especially for his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* (1765); and as a brilliant courtroom lawyer, the heroic defender of the soldiers in the Boston Massacre (1770). But it is unlikely that the Massachusetts legislature placed enough value on either achievement—or would have been urged to do so by the public—to send him to Philadelphia. His early, anonymous writings, which were generally attributed to him, were well regarded, but they were neither widely known nor long remembered before the Revolution. Nothing Adams wrote before 1776 was either republished or circulated outside New England for many years, except for his *Dissertation*, which enjoyed a greater popularity in London than it did in Boston. And his role in the Boston Massacre trials remained somewhat controversial in Boston itself. The high moral value that he placed on defending the soldiers must have been shared by some—one would hope many—of his contemporaries, but it was posterity that would see his defense in heroic terms.[52]

In the early 1770s, however, John Adams performed two services that put the Massachusetts House in his debt: he provided the solid legal arguments in its two replies to Governor Hutchinson in 1773; and in February 1774 he persuaded leaders of the House that they could use the weapon of impeachment to undermine the authority of the province's chief justice, Peter Oliver, for his refusal to reject a Crown salary. These actions share two things in common: they have been largely ignored by historians (indeed, his role in the replies to Hutchinson was quite unknown until well into the twentieth century), and they required a depth of legal knowledge that was probably beyond any other Patriot lawyer in Massachusetts. Whatever posterity has chosen to make of these achievements, the House of Representatives was keenly aware of them. Influential members of the chamber felt that they owed John Adams something special, and they expected that if they sent him to Congress, he would achieve something special.[53]

When Adams returned to Braintree in mid-July from his long journey to Maine, the royal government of Massachusetts was entering its last weeks of effective control of the province. Under the Massachusetts Government Act, thirty-six new mandamus councilors chosen in London were to take office on 1 August, and a regiment of British regulars from Halifax would land in Boston a week later. The statute's new regulations governing courts and jurors were to go into effect at the next quarter sessions, in the fall. The people of Massachusetts, however, immediately and overwhelmingly rejected the new regime in every county. The courts, whose authority was already compromised by protests against Chief Justice Peter Oliver, soon shut down across the province, and those mandamus councilors who were not pressured into resigning their commissions had no authority outside Boston. General Gage, whose troops and

warships securely controlled only Boston and Charlestown, was able to send small military patrols several miles into the countryside until April 1775, but his exercise of civil authority beyond the city ceased by September 1774. Within four months of its passage, the Massachusetts Government Act had effectively ended royal government in Massachusetts.[54]

On 10 August, as local leaders and orderly crowds were beginning the process of replacing the rapidly expiring royal government with the extralegal authority of unarmed—but soon to be armed—rebellion, John Adams and three colleagues set off from Boston for Philadelphia to attend the First Continental Congress. True to his resolve of late June, Adams began filling his journal with observations of the important cities and towns he saw and of the several local political leaders whom he met as soon as he crossed into Connecticut. His route took him through a few Connecticut towns he had visited in 1771—Hartford, Wethersfield, and Middletown—and then to others new to him, most notably New Haven. The party halted in New York City for nearly a week, and every day Adams wrote detailed accounts of what he heard and saw. Four days on the road through central New Jersey passed quickly, but Adams paid careful attention to the College of New Jersey at Princeton, just as he had to Yale College in New Haven, and to King's College—later Columbia—in New York, and would do to nearly every college or university that he visited anywhere in America or Europe. On 29 August, the day after the party crossed the Delaware River into Pennsylvania, it was met at Frankford, five miles north of Philadelphia, by a large delegation of the city's leaders and escorted to its destination.[55]

Adams served in the First Continental Congress from its opening on 5 September to its adjournment on 26 October 1774. He was consistently an active member, sitting on several important committees, and was the equal of any Massachusetts delegate, but he was not yet the prominent floor leader or penman that he would become in the Second Continental Congress in 1775 and 1776. In committee and plenary debates he took a determined stand in defending America's liberties, but on several occasions he suggested compromise language that helped to bridge strong differences of opinion among the delegates. Yet by one measure—and not an inconsiderable one for future generations of Americans—John Adams was at certain points in the proceedings the most important man in the First Congress, because only he took the trouble to record in his diary, even if briefly, what several members actually said there.[56]

Of the many challenges facing the First Continental Congress, two were of primary importance to the development and public expression of John Adams's political thought. The first was the need to restrain the resistance movement in Massachusetts from risking any violent confrontation with British authority, while at the same time encouraging the people of that province to defend their rights. In walking this tightrope, the Congress, on 17 September, approved the Suffolk Resolves, which Boston's Patriots had drafted to declare their firm

opposition to General Gage's attempt to enforce the Massachusetts Government Act. At the same time, however, Congress counseled the province's Patriot leadership not to assume all the formal powers of government that General Gage could no longer exercise. The Second Continental Congress repeated this caution in the early summer of 1775. This restraint, which Massachusetts's leaders reluctantly recognized as essential to preserve the hopes of eventual reconciliation with Britain still held by many New Englanders, and by even more colonists to the south, limited the governmental functions that their provincial congresses could assume, both in the fall of 1774 and in 1775, even after Lexington and Concord. This same restraint also shaped the arguments that John Adams would make in his *Letters of Novanglus* in the winter of 1775, and deferred to the late fall of 1775 and the winter and spring of 1776 any substantial attempts, in which John Adams would become deeply involved, to constitute new autonomous governments, not only in Massachusetts but in nearly every colony in British North America.[57]

The second challenge facing the Congress that both affected and embodied Adams's political thought was the need to develop a comprehensive foundation for the colonies' assertion of their rights within the British Empire. The delegates met this need by framing the first of its major pronouncements, a text commonly known by the title, "A Declaration of Rights and Grievances," which Congress passed on 14 October 1774. In early September, John Adams and his cousin Samuel had been appointed to the large committee entrusted with stating the rights of the colonies, and John's contribution to the final "Declaration" is clear in at least two major passages. The first, a simple statement that immediately preceded the document's formal list of resolves, declared that "the inhabitants of the English Colonies in North America, by the immutable laws of nature, the principles of the English constitution, and the several charters or compacts, have the following Rights." The second passage to which Adams contributed was the fourth numbered right, or resolve, which was both the longest and the most controversial of the Declaration's ten numbered resolves. It declared: "That the foundation of English liberty, and of all free government, is the right of the people to participate in their legislative council: and as the English colonists are not represented, and from their local and other circumstances, cannot be properly represented in the British parliament, they are entitled to a free and exclusive power of legislation in their several provincial legislatures, where their right of representation can alone be preserved, in all cases of taxation and internal policy, subject only to the negative of their sovereign, in such manner as has been heretofore used and accustomed."[58]

This passage, in company with the statement that introduced the resolves, neatly summarized Adams's long and learned arguments for the Massachusetts House of Representatives in its 1773 replies to Governor Thomas Hutchinson. But his most immediate contribution to resolve number 4 was his skillful fram-

ing of compromise language in the resolve's second sentence, by which the colonists "cheerfully consent to the operation of such acts of the British parliament, as are bona fide, restrained to the regulation of our external commerce, for the purpose of securing the commercial advantages of the whole empire to the mother country, and the commercial benefits of its respective members; excluding every idea of taxation, internal or external, for raising a revenue on the subjects in America, without their consent." This formulation finally settled the long and sometimes rancorous committee and floor debates between delegates who wished to formally acknowledge the legitimacy of Parliament's Navigation Acts (Congress's most moderate members); those who were reluctant to accord the Navigation Act such respect, but thought it unwise to demand a fresh and immediate reconsideration of all British legislation affecting America passed before 1763 (many centrists, here including John Adams); and those who favored a full review of every parliamentary statute that ever affected North America (the most radical position).[59]

The importance of John Adams's service in the Congress, however, extends beyond his contribution to that body's deliberations and its historical record, to the impact of the entire experience upon his thought: being chosen by his Massachusetts countrymen to represent them to men he had never seen; traveling to Philadelphia and meeting the leaders of several colonies he had never visited; confronting with them the host of difficult issues that faced the Congress; and, finally, returning to New England with a new sense of America's cause. The First Continental Congress was the kernel of American government, and its members were the first Americans to enjoy the terrible privilege of addressing many of the problems whose immediate solutions would shape the character and determine the future of the new nation.

But the provincial lawyer from Massachusetts did not become an American overnight. His next major political work, his *Letters of Novanglus* (January–April 1775), would betray many signs of a deeply provincial outlook, even as it moved into new political and intellectual territory. And as he left Philadelphia, perhaps unsure that what he had seen, heard, and done had fundamentally changed his world, he confided to his diary: "Took our Departure in a very great Rain, from the happy, the peacefull, the elegant, the hospitable, and polite City of Philadelphia.—It is not very likely that I shall ever see this Part of the World again."[60] On 28 October 1774, John Adams's usually profound powers of political judgment, which would produce exceptionally accurate predictions at several points during his long career, quite failed him.

5. The Power and Limits of the Dominion Strategy

At the beginning of the 1770s, in the brief interlude between the end of popular resistance to the Townshend duties and the explosive response to the Tea Act that is sometimes called "the period of quiet," Britain's North American colonies

were in a fragile political state. Local leaders in several provinces felt as uncertain of the future of their relations with the British ministry and Parliament as they ever had, and more than a few provinces faced political conflicts within their own borders: of one branch of government against another, one political class against another, or even whole regions in conflict with one another. What they needed in their relations with Britain was a common legal foundation for the autonomous powers that each province felt, in its own way, was both its heritage and its hope of achieving harmony at home and a secure place within the British Empire. What they seized on was their common history as substantially autonomous political entities established by royal grants, in royal dominion lands.

The recovery of this heritage by individual writers and its formulation into a kind of dominion school of colonial autonomy began in the 1760s in response to the Stamp Act. But it did not attain official status anywhere in America until January 1773, when the Massachusetts House of Representatives recruited John Adams to help defend its autonomous rights, and the rights of its constituents, against Governor Thomas Hutchinson's assertion that Parliament was and must be the supreme political authority throughout the British Empire. Over the next two years, Adams and the Massachusetts House of Representatives, and then James Wilson, Thomas Jefferson, and the delegates from a dozen British North American colonies who assembled in the First Continental Congress, all asserted their claims to inviolable rights on the basis of the colonies' historical foundations as societies and governments in established dominion lands that, in their view, were and always had been beyond the reach of parliamentary authority.

Even as they did this, however, at least some colonial spokesmen, including John Adams, were acutely aware that their arguments, no matter how well crafted, might fail in London.[61] In asserting their claim to the same political rights enjoyed by Britons living in Britain, they were being faithful to the political, social, and constitutional history of British North America. But they were also, without realizing it, attempting to rewrite the constitutional history of Great Britain since the Glorious Revolution. The autonomous dominion rights that British North Americans sought in 1774 would not be conceded to any colony by Britain until the creation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867. As a long-term solution to their conflict with British authority, constitutional developments of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would suggest that a dominion relationship for North America might indeed have been workable, but as a short-term eighteenth-century solution it was impossible. Parliament would never allow its monarch to become the sole constitutional connection between Britain and America, as every American dominion writer demanded. To do so would, in its view, have provided the king an independent revenue and independent power, the very horrors that England had struggled to overcome in 1688–89.

Quite apart from this formidable obstacle, which Americans with a good knowledge of recent English history could at least understand, the dominion strategy had a serious limitation that they do not appear to have at first appreciated. By anchoring their constitutional future to an external political entity, even if that entity were merely a single person, Britain's constitutional monarch, Britain's North American colonies must inevitably have accepted certain bounds, set by forces outside their control, to their aspirations as autonomous polities. When the British first granted dominion status to one of their colonies in 1867, they allowed that colony, Canada, nothing like the autonomy that the delegates to the First Continental Congress had sought for their several colonies more than ninety years earlier. Full independence would not be granted to any former British colony or possession until the twentieth century. In the eighteenth century, Britain's North American colonies south of Canada, for a host of social, economic, and geographic reasons, were seeking far more control over their own affairs than even a dominion-based connection to Great Britain could possibly allow.[62]

Before the battles at Lexington and Concord, however, and for some Patriots well after that event, there did not appear to be any plausible alternative to the dominion strategy. Because it was squarely rooted in early seventeenth-century English history, British North Americans could hope that Great Britain's rulers and people would understand an appeal to dominion autonomy. It was also, in effect, a rough approximation of the actual connection between Britain and America that had generally prevailed in the several decades of "salutary neglect" before the imperial reforms that began in 1763. More important, however, was the fact that the only apparent theoretical alternative to basing American rights on dominion autonomy was an appeal to universal natural rights, based on universal natural law. And that strategy, although briefly mentioned in the First Congress's "Declaration of Rights and Grievances," was well designed for only one contingency, a decision by the American colonies to sever, totally and unilaterally, their connection with Britain and take their station as independent nations, or as a union of nations, among all the nations of the world. It cannot be shown that any American desired this independence in the fall of 1774, although many feared it.[63]

John Adams was no more eager than any other Patriot for independence, and in the winter of 1775, in his *Letters of Novanglus*, he would make one last attempt to defend the idea of dominion-based American autonomy. His highest allegiance, however, was to America's liberties, not to the concept of a dominion. He later remembered expressing this clearly in the winter of 1774 to Judge Edmund Trowbridge as they discussed the controversy over impeaching Judge Peter Oliver. In Adams's account, Trowbridge, who was well informed about both the effort of the House of Representatives to impeach Oliver and Adams's involvement in that effort, said: "I see Mr. Adams you are determined to explore

the Constitution and bring to Life all its dormant and latent Powers, in defence of your Liberties as you understand them. I answered I should be very happy if the Constitution could carry Us safely through all our difficulties without having recourse to higher Powers not written."[64]

As the year 1775 began, John Adams was still trying, as he had been since his "Clarendon" letters a decade earlier, to secure America's liberties within the bounds of the British constitution. The events of that fateful year, and the daring explorations of his own imagination, would soon convince him that he would have to broaden his constitutional view to secure the liberties he loved.

IV

From Imperial Dominion to Autonomous Republic

1774–1775

> If Aristotle, Livy, and Harrington, knew what a republic was, the British constitution is much more like a republic than an empire. They define a republic to be *a government of laws, and not of men*. If this definition is just, the British constitution is nothing more nor less than a republic, in which the king is first magistrate. This office being hereditary, and being possessed of such ample and splendid prerogatives, is no objection to the government's being a republic, as long as it is bound by fixed laws, which the people have a voice in making, and a right to defend.
>
> Letters of Novanglus, *letter VII, 6 March 1775*

In the winter of 1775, John Adams returned to the theme that he had begun so tentatively to explore in 1772, the nature of republican government. His renewed attention to republicanism, however, was no more a deliberate, self-conscious decision than his putting it aside had been nearly three years earlier. In 1773 and early 1774, the Massachusetts legislature was eager to acquire a legal foundation for the province's autonomy; by the summer and fall of 1774, nearly every British North American colony was seeking a similar foundation. In each case, the only apparent solution was to claim the colonists' historical dominion status. Thus, when John Adams set out to defend both the Continental Congress and Massachusetts's Patriot leadership in his *Letters of Novanglus* in January 1775, he continued to develop this line of argument.

By early 1775, however, the political setting in which Adams thought and wrote was changing in ways that made the perfection of a dominion-based strategy for claiming autonomy less important, at least for the present, than it had been just one year earlier. What Massachusetts needed most was an effective government that could function for an indefinite period without royal officials or royal authority of any kind. A dominion government was appropriate for membership in an empire, and if Americans could persuade Britain to honor the rights they claimed, they would gladly remain in its empire. By September 1774,

however, the province of Massachusetts, while not yet outside the British Empire, was no longer a functioning component within it. In the sudden totality of its rejection of the Massachusetts Government Act and its official enforcer, General Thomas Gage, Massachusetts society had unexpectedly achieved almost total autonomy, and through the course of European history those few autonomous nations not ruled by one man or a small group of men were considered to be republics. If this remarkable new "Republic of Massachusetts" was to develop, even if temporarily, both an executive and a judiciary that were based, like its legislature, solely on the authority of the people, it had to become more familiar with the republican idea.

Just as his provincial world was changing around him, Adams was enlarging the scope of his thought by exploring the ideas of political writers whose reputations had long intrigued him but whose works he had not previously studied in depth. He had begun reading Algernon Sidney in 1769 or earlier, began referring to John Locke's political writings in 1770, and by 1773, if not well before, was quite familiar with several continental theorists, including three mid-eighteenth-century authors who were becoming popular in intellectual circles, Vattel, Rousseau, and Beccaria. Sometime between 1773 and early 1775, however, Adams began to study writers who focused on the structural intricacies of republics. His first references to the classical authors Aristotle, Polybius, and Livy, and to Florence's Niccolò Machiavelli, were brief, but his engagement with the seventeenth-century English Commonwealth theorist James Harrington was more substantial. By March 1775, John Adams's political reading was predominantly republican; it would remain so for the rest of his life.

Thus while the *Letters of Novanglus* began in January 1775 as a defense of colonial autonomy within an empire centered on a constitutional monarchy, as espoused by Massachusetts's Patriot leaders and the Continental Congress, and in February seemed on course to become the most thorough and detailed exploration of the dominion theory of autonomy by any American writer, Adams pushed boldly into new territory in March, openly embracing republicanism and advancing a radical new foundation for colonial autonomy, based solely on voluntary American allegiance to Britain's king. This paralleled the work of Massachusetts's leaders who, by the late winter of 1775, were effectively performing the work of both a two-house legislature and a plural executive in their Provincial Congress. That body devoted the greatest part of its efforts to regulating and supplying colonial America's largest and most effective militia. When the battles at Lexington and Concord turned a civil rebellion into armed insurrection in April 1775, Massachusetts's new government was ready to meet the challenge.

The particular character of republicanism that John Adams espoused in the winter of 1775, however, gave the first hint that his political ideas, which had radically departed from mainstream British political thought over the past three years, might at some point depart from the political mainstream of his American

countrymen as well. In *Novanglus*, he declared that a constitutional monarchy that incorporated effective limits on arbitrary power should properly be considered a republic, and that Britain itself was "more like a republic than an empire." This bold declaration attracted little attention in 1775, Adams made no effort to develop it for over a year, and it played only a modest role in his republican vision before Independence. But his novel concept of republicanism would have larger implications for his construction of a new constitution for Massachusetts in 1779 and would shape decisively the fullest statement of his political thought in the 1780s.

1. The Birth of the Republic of Massachusetts

As John Adams traveled north and east toward Boston in the fall of 1774, the weather was much cooler than it had been on his trip southward in August. The political climate was harder to gauge. New York City's Sons of Liberty told him they feared local moderates had gained ground while Congress sat, but in Connecticut the zealous Massachusetts delegates were welcomed as heroes and entreated by several towns to delay their journey or change their route to attend patriotic celebrations. In Suffield, just below the Massachusetts border, Adams first recorded seeing a town militia at drill. Crossing into Massachusetts, he met local leaders who were convinced that Congress had saved America; that mighty Great Britain would have to back down. Adams himself was less sanguine about Britain's response to Congress. But upon his arrival in Braintree on 9 November, his concerns for the future took on new dimensions as he began to appreciate what had happened in Massachusetts in the three months he had been away.[1]

The Massachusetts Government Act, from the moment that news of its passage arrived in Boston, on 2 June 1774, began the process of dismantling the existing provincial government, both by the sudden, arbitrary changes it effected from above and, even more dramatically, by the massive resistance it ignited from below. The government that it dissolved was nominally a royal colony within a vast military empire. But throughout its history, the province of Massachusetts Bay (1691–1774) had existed, at times uneasily, at the edge of a very different kind of polity, a self-governing republic. Still vivid in the historical memory of many provincials was its antecedent, the Massachusetts Bay Colony (1629–84), which had embodied an earlier republican vision whose elitism and intolerance John Adams had ignored in constructing his sanitized portrait of the Puritan colony for eighteenth-century readers in his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* in 1765.[2]

In the summer and fall of 1774, courtesy of the assault on the provincial charter by Lord North, King George III, and the British Parliament, a fundamentally new polity—a republic in form, although not in name—suddenly took shape on the shores of Massachusetts Bay. No colony, province, or state named the Republic of Massachusetts had ever existed or ever would exist, and there is

no evidence that anyone in provincial Massachusetts was consciously thinking or openly talking about republics until John Adams began to do so, indirectly and tentatively in 1770, during the Boston Massacre trials, and in 1771, on his tour through Connecticut, before he explored the republican tradition more boldly at Braintree in 1772. But even he would not give the new political reality that was emerging around him its proper name until his neighbors had begun to construct that reality.

In retrospect, however, the life course of Massachusetts's republic in the 1760s and early 1770s is clear enough. As long as the province had chief executives whose first loyalty was to London and who could strongly influence and, if necessary, control the Council and the judiciary, royal government was secure. The executive's authority and the periodic resistance of the House of Representatives to that authority gave mid-eighteenth-century provincial politics the familiar "court versus country" dichotomy that was common to so many British colonies and often characterized political life in Britain itself. And Massachusetts's governors, both British-born and native, did remain loyal to the Crown to the end.[3]

In the mid-1760s, however, Governor Francis Bernard and his lieutenant governor, Thomas Hutchinson, who were often at loggerheads with the House of Representatives over several local issues, not only were burdened with defending the Sugar and Stamp acts but also began to lose their grip on another branch of the government. The Council, heretofore nearly always loyal to the governor, began to move into opposition in 1766 and was thoroughly antiministerial by the early spring of 1774, before General Gage and the Boston Port Act arrived in Boston. The five judges of the Superior Court were more reliable supporters of Crown authority into the early 1770s, but when the House of Representatives insisted that they refuse the salaries that Britain offered them in 1772, all but Chief Justice Peter Oliver agreed. And in February 1774 the representatives, at John Adams's urging, hounded Oliver with a bill of impeachment, the classic recourse of English Parliaments when confronted with powerful ministers of the Stuart monarchs.[4]

Finally, Richard D. Brown has effectively demonstrated that in the seven years before Lexington and Concord, the people of Massachusetts, who had nearly always behaved as loyal, if not always happy, subjects of the monarch and his (or her) representative, the governor, began to assert their independence in the declarations and resolves of both their legislative representatives and their town governments. In 1768, the towns sent delegates to a provincial convention to assert their rights. In the winter of 1772–73, as they answered the call of Boston's Committee of Correspondence by forming scores of local committees to oppose British policy, they began to introduce a republican concept of political balance from below to match their support for their increasingly republican legislators in the House of Representatives and on the Council. In hundreds of public re-

solves against the British ministry's determination to pay the governor's and the judges' salaries, the towns criticized Governor Hutchinson for refusing to join the House and the Council in defense of the people's rights. Braintree, for example, on 1 March 1773, resolved: "All civil officers are or ought to be Servants of the People & dependent upon them for their official Support; and every instance to the Contrary from the Governor downwards tends to crush & destroy civil liberty." In 1773, the people of Massachusetts rejected the older, traditional concept of balanced governments that represented three orders in society—monarchy, aristocracy, and the people—and that John Adams would endorse, in favor of seeing all public officials as servants of the whole people. On 16 December of that year, in Boston, several hundred of these people destroyed the British East India Company's tea in public, a daring, illegal act.[5]

In the spring of 1774, Massachusetts possessed every institution enjoyed by the freer of Europe's historic and current republics—a people jealous of their rights; democratic local governments and an elected assembly to express their rights; an indirectly elected council that had recently begun to endorse the popular will; and a locally dependent judiciary—except for one: an executive who was ultimately responsible to the people. By May 1774, Massachusetts had roughly the form of a republic and was rapidly acquiring a popular republican culture. It lacked only the autonomy of a republic.

The Massachusetts Government Act soon supplied this deficiency. By unilaterally altering the Charter of 1691 to curb the independence of the town meetings, the courts, and the Council, Britain validated each of those institutions in the eyes of the people, while destroying the authority of the one official, the governor, who had never owed his highest allegiance to the people. The collapse was sudden. In June, Governor (and General) Thomas Gage failed to prevent the assembly from appointing delegates to a Continental Congress in Philadelphia. In August he could not convene a full Council because popular pressure forced more than half of the new, royally appointed mandamus councilors to renounce their commissions. On 2 September, the news of Gage's successful surprise raid on a local powder magazine the previous day sparked a mass rising of the provincial militia. Unfounded rumors that Gage's army and navy were attacking the civilian population of Boston drew thousands of armed men to Cambridge, ready to mount a rash assault on British forces. Patriot leaders quickly quashed the rumors and quieted the militiamen but did not send them home before praising their vigilance in the defense of American liberty. Four days later, a mass gathering of local militia in Worcester County forced nearly all the county judges to condemn the Massachusetts Government Act, leaving just three recalcitrant jurists to retreat to Boston.[6]

That same week, Governor Thomas Gage called for the election of a new provincial assembly, to meet in Salem on 5 October. Some ninety legislators were elected and set out for Salem, but in late September the governor, concerned

at the continuing unrest in the province following the turmoil at Cambridge and Worcester, rescinded his summons. The lawmakers gathered anyway, waited for Gage for three days, and then took the initiative. They organized themselves as Massachusetts's first Provincial Congress, invited towns that were not represented to send delegates, and agreed to meet in Cambridge later in the month. The province's commitment to resist the Coercive Acts, affirmed in the Suffolk Resolves of 9 September, had already ended both official and popular cooperation with royal authority in every county. General Gage's government of mandamus councilors and soldiers contracted to the narrow confines of Boston. On 17 October, the Provincial Congress met in Cambridge and began, rather tentatively, to exercise political control throughout the province, but it soon adjourned to late November, when the delegates hoped that the resolves of the First Continental Congress would afford a clearer view of where America's controversy with Britain was headed. This is where Massachusetts's new republican-style government—with a still somewhat inchoate mission and uncertain prospects, and without a name—stood when John Adams returned home to Braintree in early November 1774.[7]

2. Preparing for *Novanglus*

John Adams's Braintree neighbors lost no time in placing him in the new political scene. In late November they named him a delegate to the last session of the first Provincial Congress. He attended that body at Cambridge in early December, probably contributed to the drafting of its public proclamations, and was there reappointed to attend the next Continental Congress, which was scheduled to meet in Philadelphia in May if Britain had not redressed America's grievances. But he found time to begin reading the new polemical pamphlet literature that attacked the Continental Congress, and even before setting out for Cambridge, he began to draft a reply to one Tory author. As with several earlier pieces, however, he did not complete or publish it. It was in this setting, mostly at home in Braintree pondering America's fate, that Adams encountered a challenger who would call forth his longest, most learned political work before Independence.[8]

In the decade since the Stamp Act crisis, Patriot authors, those whom Adams called "Americans in Principle, i.e. against the Taxation of Americans, by Authority of Parliament," had dominated the newspaper columns and local presses in nearly every colony in British North America. Most spirited defenses of Parliament were imported from London. But in the late fall and winter of 1774–75, Britain's American defenders, who were now widely called Tories, mounted a counterattack. The success of the First Continental Congress, and of the hundreds and then thousands of provincial congressmen, town and county officials and jurors, and urban and rural committeemen who supported the Congress and began usurping royal authority from Maine to South Carolina,

finally convinced the few Anglican clergymen and prominent lawyers sympathetic to the Crown that they could no longer delay voicing their objections to this unlawful authority. Some clerics in New York and other middle colonies wrote the first Tory pamphlets immediately after the adjournment of the First Continental Congress, but in December Massachusetts produced its first important new conservative writer in nearly a decade, over the ungainly signature, "Massachusettensis."[9]

Daniel Leonard, the most prominent pre-Revolutionary lawyer in Bristol County, began publishing his *Massachusettensis* letters in the *Massachusetts Gazette* on 12 December 1774, and they continued to appear every Monday through 3 April 1775. A well-known figure in the province, both professionally and socially, Leonard had been a steady member of the Patriot party in the House of Representatives for several years, but not long after the Boston Tea Party he joined Governor Hutchinson's supporters, and in August 1774 he accepted an appointment as a mandamus councilor from Governor Gage under the Massachusetts Government Act. Adams, who had regularly argued cases before both the inferior and superior courts of Bristol County since 1762, knew Leonard well, had always liked him, and almost immediately guessed that he might be the essays' author. But he soon decided that another likely candidate, his old personal friend and journalistic rival, Jonathan Sewall, must be Massachusettensis, and he held to this conviction long after clear evidence of Leonard's authorship became public. Adams pondered for some weeks whether to reply to this powerful voice of Massachusetts's Tories, perhaps because he was reluctant, as he had been at least once before, to oppose an old friend, whether Leonard or Sewall. But when no one stepped forward to answer Massachusettensis, John Adams began to write his *Letters of Novanglus*.[10]

In both prolixity and erudition, *Novanglus* far exceeds anything John Adams had written before, or would write again until the late 1780s. Its length and learning were in part determined by his antagonist—Massachusettensis published seventeen essays to Novanglus's thirteen—but only in part. Even a cursory reading of Adams's text discovers a greater range of issues, set in a broader expanse of time and place, than he had previously attempted, even in his learned exchanges with General William Brattle and Governor Thomas Hutchinson. But the extended scope of his argument was not merely a matter of tracing the history of liberty and tyranny through more nations across more centuries; it also called forth an effort to incorporate into his text the teachings of several prominent political theorists, including two authors whose work Adams had long wished to understand but had never found the time to master.

When Adams published his first *Novanglus* letter, it appeared that he might attempt a review of some two millennia of republican thought, but in subsequent essays he restricted his quotations, citations, and references to just a few early modern European writers, including two authorities on international law

whom he had quoted in 1773, Hugo Grotius and Samuel Pufendorf. Of the several other authors he had previously cited, he expanded his appeals to just three, the republican martyr Algernon Sidney, the inescapable John Locke, and his favorite legal authority, Sir Edward Coke, whose *Reports* play a major role in the later letters in the series. But in *Novanglus*, for the first time in all his writings, he began quoting Niccolò Machiavelli, whose ideas, or at least his reputation, had first caught Adams's attention fifteen years earlier. And amid all these legal and republican worthies, he introduced and featured just one author who was entirely new to his work: James Harrington.[11]

Just when John Adams opened up his mind to a serious consideration of the republican thought that now appears in his writings, either for the first time or in a more prominent role than ever before, remains obscure. We know he was reading Algernon Sidney's *Discourses on Government* in 1769, and he may have first read it a decade earlier, but in 1775 he displayed a deeper interest in this republican classic than he had at his last previous quotation from that work, in his closing argument to the jury at the trial of the British soldiers indicted in the Boston Massacre in 1770. He also quoted Locke more extensively, blending passages from the *Second Treatise on Government* into other passages from Sidney's *Discourses*. He could have been reading Machiavelli, probably in books borrowed from friends or from the Harvard College library, at any time since his first mention of the Florentine republican in 1760, but his brief quotations in *Novanglus* suggest that he had only begun a serious study of this seminal author. Any narrative foundation for the sudden, extensive appearance of James Harrington's *Oceana* in the seventh letter of *Novanglus*, however, must be largely speculative. But as we shall see, Adams would discover an immediate and compelling reason to consider the nature of republicanism as he proceeded to write his *Novanglus* letters.[12]

John Adams's intellectual encounter with Harrington in Novanglus's seventh letter highlights the problem of determining when and how he learned his political theory. Harrington's name had appeared just twice before in Adams's published writings, first in his list of eight notable English statesmen and writers in his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* in 1765, and next in his list of seven celebrated republican writers in the first letter of *Novanglus* in January 1775. Somewhere in the latter part of this decade Adams had begun to master the essential literature of the republican political tradition. Perhaps the starting point was his preparation for his oration on mixed government at Braintree in May 1772. He may have devoted much of the two-month period following his return to Braintree from Congress in November 1774 to this study. Possibly he was still reading and taking notes on Harrington's *Oceana* as late as February 1775, just before composing his seventh letter, of 6 March. Whenever he acquired his knowledge of republican thought, his first open expression of his

deep faith in the republican form of government appears in *Novanglus*, and for the first time it appears under the republican label.

3. The *Letters of Novanglus*

John Adams either published or saw others publish, sometimes without his consent, six full-length volumes of his writings during his nearly sixty-year literary career. These major works were the *Letters of Novanglus* (1775; 1819 in book form), *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States* (1787–88, in three volumes), *Discourses on Davila* (1790–91; 1805 in book form), and *Letters to the Boston Patriot* (1809–12). All four share certain features that determine their strengths, their weaknesses, and their general character. Adams composed each work as a series of untitled letters or essays—a fact that has been obscured in the *Defence* by the best-known edition of that work—and only the *Defence* was not published serially in newspapers before appearing in full volumes. In all four works, he had no clear idea of the ultimate shape, extent, or contents of his text until he was well into the writing or, in the case of the interrupted *Novanglus* and the abandoned *Davila*, had in effect completed it.[13]

This manner of composition vitiated any clear sense of structure in Adams's longer works, but in *Novanglus*, at least, it did give his argument a sense of immediacy. The fact that much of the *Letters of Novanglus* was devoted to refuting arguments that were being advanced by his principal antagonist, Massachusettensis, and occasionally those by other Tory writers as well, encouraged this ad hoc style. Moreover, both the length of *Novanglus* and the method of its composition meant that Adams could explore in detail important ideas that, in shorter and more tightly organized essays, would never receive a full development.[14]

Adams placed twelve letters signed "Novanglus" in the *Boston Gazette* from 23 January to 17 April 1775, and he had just submitted a thirteenth to the printers when the events at Lexington and Concord abruptly interrupted the publication of that newspaper. In these essays he achieved one broad objective, the building of an extensive legal and historical defense for the assertion by Britain's North American colonies that they were beyond the authority of the British Parliament. In the earlier letters of the series, he based his case firmly on the claim that the colonies had originated as autonomous communities established in dominion lands granted by the English monarch for settlement. This argument, first advanced by Adams in the Massachusetts House of Representatives' exchange with Governor Thomas Hutchinson in 1773, reaffirmed in pamphlets by James Wilson and Thomas Jefferson in August 1774, and then declared, most succinctly, in John Adams's wording of the fourth resolve of the First Continental Congress's Declaration of Rights and Grievances in October 1774, here reached its most elaborate form.[15]

Beginning with letter VIII of *Novanglus*, however, Adams suddenly abandoned this position, to which he had devoted untold hours of legal and historical research and writing over some two years, in favor of a radically different argument. England's first settlers in America, he now declared, owed their allegiance to their king because they had been born his subjects, not because they were occupying dominion lands (to which the monarch's title, Adams suggested, was far from perfect). Their allegiance by birth meant that they could never reject their monarch's authority without committing treason. The settlers' descendants in America, however, did not owe England's (and later Britain's) monarch an allegiance of the same character. Their sole bond with Great Britain, like that of their forefathers with England, was their allegiance to the person of the king. But the allegiance of the sons was an entirely voluntary agreement to a contract, freely entered into both by the colonists and by the monarch.

In *Novanglus*, Adams also began to explore another novel idea, that all limited, free governments, including constitutional monarchies, notably that of Great Britain, were in effect republics. *Novanglus* is the first text in which, too subtly to attract much notice, John Adams's general view of republicanism began to diverge from the rapidly evolving political mainstream in America. The following analysis will explore *Novanglus*'s two contrasting arguments for colonial autonomy and its conception of the essential nature of republican government. The views of both autonomy and republicanism that Adams advanced in early 1775 would soon inform his public and private writings and his speeches and actions as a member of Congress, as that body faced the urgent demands of several British North American colonies, including his own beloved province of Massachusetts Bay, that it recommend governments that could enable them to defend their rights within the British Empire and then, in 1776, to secure their independence from that empire.

John Adams's *Letters of Novanglus* evolved into a highly learned tract that explored, at a level of detail that perhaps only well-read lawyers, historians, and political theorists could fully appreciate, the origins of colonial autonomy and the nature of republican government that could apply to a variety of settler societies, in America or elsewhere. But it did not begin that way. Its first several letters recounted the local struggle between Whigs (Patriots) and Tories in Massachusetts, interspersed with summaries of well-known laws, decisions, and events in the recent, troubled relationship between nearly all of Britain's North American colonies and the British Crown and Parliament. Letter I, although the shortest of the series, meted out criticism or praise to a profusion of contested ideas, historical figures, celebrated nations, and political writers: the arguments advanced by three current Tory antagonists, Massachusettensis (whom Adams unmistakably—and mistakenly—identified as Jonathan Sewall), "A Veteran," and Thomas Bradbury Chandler, whose *A Friendly Address to all Rea-*

sonable Americans he had briefly attempted to answer in November; a host of "tyrants" from Philip of Macedon through James II to Thomas Hutchinson; several countries that had successfully resisted tyrannies, from early republican Rome to modern Switzerland, the Netherlands, and England under Oliver Cromwell; and seven great theorists of liberty, from Plato to John Locke.[16]

Amid this plethora of historical detail, however, Adams did advance a few important propositions. First, he countered Massachusettensis's claim that the Whigs harbored secret and sinister designs that he would "penetrate . . . and expose" by asserting that every measure that Whig leaders adopted was immediately published in full in letters, resolves, and addresses to the people, on whose support they were always dependent. He added that if the Whigs did have any secrets, they would never have communicated them to Massachusettensis, and he made a counterpromise to his readers that he would show "the wicked policy of the Tories—trace their plan from its first rude sketches to its present compleat draught. Shew that it has been much longer in contemplation, than is generally known." Second, Adams conceded his opponent's assertion that "the bulk of the people are generally but little versed in matters of state," but he used the point to argue that for over a decade the people had been warned by Patriot writers that the Tories had sinister objectives, but they had only recently come to believe this. He was confident, however, that the people possessed a love of liberty, and now that they had been awakened to their danger by real, not imagined, oppression, they would resist. Adams closed letter I with a denial of Massachusettensis's assertion that the people were "sure to be loosers" in their determination to resist British authority. "They can hardly be loosers, if unsuccessful," Novanglus argued, "because if they live, they can but be slaves, after an unfortunate effort, and slaves they would have been, if they had not resisted. So that nothing is lost. If they die, they cannot be said to lose, for death," as Adams had confided to his diary in 1774, "is better than slavery." And "if they succeed, their gains are immense. They preserve their liberties."[17]

But John Adams's most important argument in letter I was a passionate reply to what he saw as Massachusettensis's essential critique of the Patriot movement, which he quoted at length:

> They [i.e., the popular leaders] begin by reminding the people of the elevated rank they hold in the universe as men; that all men by nature are equal; that kings are but the ministers of the people; that their authority is delegated to them by the people for their good, and they have a right to resume it, and place it in other hands, or keep it themselves, whenever it is made use of to oppress them. Doubtless there have been instances, when these principles have been inculcated to obtain a redress of real grievances, but they have been much oftener perverted to the worst of purposes.

Novanglus angrily retorted:

> These are what are called revolution-principles. They are the principles of Aristotle and Plato, of Livy and Cicero, and Sydney, Harrington, and Lock.—The principles of nature and eternal reason.—The principles on which the whole government over us, now stands. It is therefore astonishing, if any thing can be so, that writers, who call themselves friends of government, should in this age and country, be so inconsistent with themselves, so indiscreet, so immodest, as to insinuate a doubt concerning them.[18]

Readers who knew or suspected the identity of Novanglus, and who were familiar with Adams's love of learning and his eagerness to display it in his writings, might have expected this passage to initiate an exhaustive exploration of the republican tradition, but the *Letters of Novanglus* did not unfold in this way. Adams would enlarge on "revolution-principles," but not immediately, and he would defer any discussion of the ancients, from Plato through Livy, until the 1780s. John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, however, was the preeminent proximate source for the "revolution-principles" that Massachusettensis scorned and that Novanglus so passionately defended in letter I. This is especially fitting because in January 1775, John Adams's "revolution-principles," "on which the whole government over us, now stands" derived from and quietly referred to England's Glorious Revolution of 1688–89, with which Locke's *Second Treatise* was closely associated.[19] He did not yet envision these revolution-principles, or any other principles, as the foundation for another revolution, in America. In January 1775, John Adams's "whole government" was still the British government, a government that could function properly only under the British constitution, which was largely perfected by the Glorious Revolution. As Novanglus began to turn from current political history to timeless political philosophy in letters VI and VII, however, Sidney and Locke, and then Harrington, would return to play a larger role in Adams's political thought and would guide him toward an expanded concept of revolution-principles.

If letter I seemed to promise a broad disquisition on the "revolution-principles" of republican government, letter II took a sharp turn toward the particular and the provincial. In a tightly focused essay, Novanglus began to fulfill his promise to "show the wicked policy of the Tories" in Massachusetts and "trace their plan from its first rude sketches to its present complete draught." Passionately voicing every belief and deploying every rhetorical device of America's radical Whigs in their construction of Britain's conspiracy against liberty that Bernard Bailyn has so memorably characterized as a crucial ideological foundation of the American Revolution, Adams placed the origins of the Tories' scheme in the unsuccessful attempt by the English-born governor William Shirley (1741–55), assisted by the native-born Thomas Hutchinson and Andrew Oliver, to secure salaries from Parliament for the province's executive officers.

Subsequent efforts by Governor Francis Bernard (1760–69), again assisted by Hutchinson, also failed, but Adams quoted liberally and with devastating effect from Bernard's *Principles of Law and Policy, Applied to the Government of the British Colonies in America*, a work presented in manuscript to British officials in 1764, but not published until 1774, to show the Tories' determination to remodel Massachusetts, and ultimately every colonial government, to the advantage of both royal authority and local elites, and to the disadvantage of the people.[20]

The opening of letter III, however, highlighted the difficulty of a newspaper polemicist in sustaining an argument across several issues while at the same time replying to particular points made by his antagonist as they came to his attention. Adams began the letter with a long denial of Massachusettensis's claim that the Boston press was closed to Tory writers. He next reviewed several colonial grievances against British rule, but he soon found himself almost swept away in his impassioned assertion of the popular support for the Patriots in Massachusetts and in Congress (which Massachusettensis had questioned), the ardent feelings of union between all the colonies and their peoples, and the colonies' impressive resources in food, trade, and forces of arms that would enable them to withstand even the mighty British Empire. His arguments, although expressed clearly, followed one another so rapidly that, not for the last time in his writings, they suggested he might at any point head off in some other direction or quite lose his sense of where he was and where he ought to be going.[21]

In letter IV, Adams regained his composure in an essay that rivals the controlled focus of letter II but covers much more ground. He opened with a reference to Massachusettensis's warnings of royal reprisals against the rebelling colonists in his first letter, and then addressed Massachusettensis's sudden shift to praising Britain's "generosity, justice, and humanity" in his second. This suggests that Adams, who began his *Novanglus* letters with a reference to Massachusettensis's third letter, would now go back to examine his antagonist's argument from its beginning, but neither letter IV nor subsequent essays would sustain this direct engagement. Instead, Novanglus constructed a narrative of Great Britain's efforts to suppress the right of British North Americans to be free of taxation without their consent, from the 1730s to 1772, and the Americans' spirited response: their resistance to imperial taxation, standing armies, and the payment of their governors' and judges' salaries by the Crown. Britain's long campaign to subordinate colonial rights finally became so obvious that the most sanguine patriotic colonists could no longer deny it. Even thus provoked, however, America's Whigs had no wish to be "independent of the crown of Great Britain," either as "an independent republic in America, or a confederation of independent republics." No assertion could "be more wicked, or a greater slander on the whigs; because [Massachusettensis] knows there is not a man in the province among the whigs, nor ever was, who harbors a wish of that sort."[22]

But if, in February 1775, John Adams had disposed—for the moment—of the chimera of independence from Great Britain, he was not finished with the rights of free men to be independent of a tyrannical government. After a spirited excoriation of the evils of British corruption and tyranny, he closed by raising another charge leveled by Massachusettensis. His manner of dealing with this allegation, however, was strikingly different from his denial that the colonists desired independence from Great Britain. "We are then told, that the whigs erected a provincial democracy, or republic, in the province. I wish Massachusettensis knew what a democracy or a republic is. But this subject must be considered another time."[23]

At last, the issue of republicanism had been raised directly, not by John Adams, but by his Tory opponent. Novanglus could have simply denied that Massachusetts had become "a provincial democracy, or republic," but he chose not to do so. Instead, he promised his readers that he would, at "another time," teach them "what a democracy, or republic is." That time would come three weeks later, in the seventh letter of *Novanglus*. But it was evidently Massachusettensis's second letter (of 19 December 1774), to which Novanglus was replying in his fourth letter, that prompted John Adams to engage the republican political tradition more directly than he had ever done before, and perhaps had ever imagined that he would do.

In letter V, Novanglus referred again back to Massachusettensis's third letter, as he had in letter I, and raised the prospect that he would finally broaden his provincial focus by considering the meaning of the word *rebel*, which Massachusettensis had morally equated with *tyrant*. Novanglus began by citing another of his Tory antagonists, "A Veteran," who had labeled the word rebel "a convertible term," one that was shaped by its context. He then declared: "Opposition, nay open, avowed resistance by arms, against usurpation and lawless violence, is not rebellion by the law of God, or the land. Resistance to lawful authority makes rebellion. Hampden, Russell, Sydney, Somers, Holt, Tillotson, Burnet, Hoadley, &c. were no tyrants nor rebels, altho' some of them were in arms, and the others undoubtedly excited resistance, against the tories."[24]

But Novanglus was not yet ready to commune with the heroes of English liberty. He first determined to make the case that Massachusetts's Whigs really were opposing "usurpation" by a lawless, tyrannical government. To do this he produced a superbly organized review of Massachusetts's recent history, constructed around each of its central political figures and institutions: its provincial agents in London, its House of Representatives, Council, and Superior Court, and its royal governors (particularly Thomas Hutchinson, who earned a long and unflattering portrait). The result was one of Adams's strongest essays, thoroughly provincial in detail, but richly illustrative of the American Whig view of the essential organs of a free government, serving a society of free men. And toward the end of this fifth letter, he delivered as flattering a characteriza-

tion of popular government as he would ever make. "This influence of the Whigs [Massachusettensis] calls a democracy or republic, and then a despotism: two ideas incompatible with each other. A democratical despotism is a contradiction in terms."[25]

In letter VI, Novanglus shifts his focus from the recent, troubled history of Massachusetts politics, as that politics both shaped and was shaped by British imperial policies, to the immediate crisis in America's relationship with Britain. America's Patriot leaders, he claimed, had avoided a discussion of the destruction of the tea at Boston "because they knew the delicacy of the subject, and they lived in continual hopes of a speedy restoration of liberty and peace: But we are now thrown into a situation, which would render any further delicacy upon this point criminal." He then launched into a detailed defense of the right of rebellion against arbitrary rule and, for the first time in the *Novanglus* letters, quoted extensively from three authorities: Hugo Grotius, Algernon Sidney, and John Locke. In *On the Law of War and Peace* (1625), Grotius had declared: "It is not repugnant to the law of nature, for any one to repel injuries by force," and he extended this right to the subjects of any government "when the way to legal justice is not open." Sidney, in his *Discourses on Government* (1698; written by 1683), elaborated the point:

> Seditions proceeding from malice are seldom or never seen in popular governments; for they are hurtful to the people, and none have ever willingly and knowingly hurt themselves. . . . But the magistrate who is to protect the people from injury, may, and is often known, not to have done it: he sometimes renders his office *useless by neglecting to do justice*; sometimes *mischievous by overthrowing it*. This strikes at the root of God's general ordinance, that there should be laws; and the particular ordinances of all societies that appoint such as seem best to them. . . . If the laws of God and men, are therefore of no effect, when the magistracy is left at liberty to break them; and if the lusts of those who are too strong for the tribunals of justice, cannot be otherwise restrained than by sedition, tumults and war, those seditions, tumults and wars, are justified by the laws of God and man.

And John Locke, in his *Second Treatise on Government* (1690), declared: "It is as impossible for a governor, if he really means the good of the people, and the preservation of them and the laws together, not to make them see and feel it; as it is for the father of a family, not to let his children see he loves and takes care of them." Therefore, Novanglus concluded, "the general insurrection of a whole nation does not deserve the name of a rebellion."[26]

Building on this foundation, Novanglus constructed an extended narrative of the passage of the Tea Act of 1773, the Boston Tea Party, and Parliament's approval of the Coercive Acts in 1774. He utterly rejected the notion that the Tea Act was simply a relief measure for the East India Company, arguing that a

simpler way to achieve this would have been to reduce taxes on imported tea in England. The goal of the British ministry, he declared, was to achieve the collection of import duties in the colonies, both to assert parliamentary supremacy and to fund the salaries of royal executives and judges in America. And Americans in every colony resisted the tea imports precisely to deny that supremacy. Novanglus charged that the magistrates responsible for this policy were the members of the British ministry and every royal official who attempted to enforce it. Adams's favorite villain, Thomas Hutchinson, came in for the heaviest criticism because he could have allowed the return of the tea and refused to do so. Finally, the destruction of the tea at Boston, which was a lawful resistance to arbitrary authority, allowed the British government to correct an error it had made in 1765, and again in 1767, when it attempted to collect new taxes and duties on all the British American colonies at once. Now the ministry resolved to direct the nation's coercive force at just one colony, Massachusetts, and bring it into submission, while deferring for a time a similar fate for all the other colonies. Letter VI concluded with a spirited defense of Samuel Adams's committees of correspondence and a parting shot at Governor Hutchinson and the Tory sycophants who addressed him on his departure for England in June 1774.[27]

John Adams was now ready to leave his provincial neighborhood and expand his argument to embrace all British North America, and to propose a new definition of, and architecture for, the British Empire, by placing both Britain and its colonies securely within the broad history of republican government. But Novanglus's decision to embrace and redefine republican government in letter VII, the most innovative and significant essay in this series, was not entirely voluntary. He squarely addressed the issue of republicanism in March 1775 in part because of the thoroughgoing republican transformation of his province over the preceding nine months. Moreover, the perception that Massachusetts had in effect become a republic, common among several students of Revolutionary politics long after the event, was not confined to John Adams in 1775. Others saw this, too, and one man who saw it clearly was his antagonist. In December 1774, before Novanglus had begun publishing his essays, Massachusettensis declared that the Whigs had erected "a provincial democracy, or republic, in the province." When Novanglus acknowledged this charge in letter IV, he said he must reserve for "another time" the vital task of explaining what a republic really was. On 6 March 1775, in the columns of the *Boston Gazette*, that time had come.[28]

Novanglus began letter VII by responding to Massachusettensis's claim in his fourth letter, of early January 1775, that under the British constitution, Parliament had supreme authority in America. To counter this assertion, which Governor Hutchinson had made to the Massachusetts legislature in January 1773, Adams began to repeat the legal precedents for the dominion basis for colonial autonomy that he had so painstakingly developed on that occasion. But

suddenly he changed tactics to propose that his readers imagine what a new-modeled British constitution that could guarantee English liberties throughout the British Empire might look like. He quickly concluded that its central institution, a Parliament that would fairly represent all parts of the empire, would be unworkably large. And he agreed with Massachusettensis that a grand imperial parliament might eventually be controlled by a British American majority. But toward the end of this essay he cautioned his readers against indulging in this flattering fantasy; if Americans, upon achieving such a majority, "should attempt to rule [Britain] by an American parliament, without an adequate [British] representation in it," he predicted, "she will infallibly resist us by her arms."[29]

Novanglus, however, quickly concluded that all such speculation was quite unnecessary. Both historical practice and political writing on the foundation and governing of colonies, from the ancient Greeks to the modern era, showed that contrary to Massachusettensis's assertion, colonies had often gained complete independence from their founding nation immediately upon their settlement, and the leading writers on international law had readily acknowledged this. Among those colonial systems that had not achieved independence from their founding nations, he argued, the dominion system that had evolved in British North America, with parallel legislatures and clear divisions of legislative jurisdiction, had proved entirely workable and was well adapted to the politically diverse British Empire. Moreover, Novanglus argued, the very term *British Empire* fundamentally mischaracterized the political system in which both Britons and British North Americans worked and lived:

> But however it may sound, I say we are not a part of the British empire. Because the British government is not an empire. The governments of France, Spain, &c. are not empires, but monarchies, supposed to be governed by fixed fundamental laws, tho' not really. The British government, is still less intitled to the style of an empire: it is a limited monarchy. If Aristotle, Livy, and Harrington, knew what a republic was, the British constitution is much more like a republic than an empire. They define a republic to be *a government of laws, and not of men*. If this definition is just, the British constitution is nothing more nor less than a republic, in which the king is first magistrate. This office being hereditary, and being possessed of such ample and splendid prerogatives, is no objection to the government's being a republic, as long as it is bound by fixed laws, which the people have a voice in making, and a right to defend.[30]

Why did John Adams advance this startling contention in 1775? His larger argument in *Novanglus* did not require him to do so. Immediately prior to this passage, he had restated, with admirable economy, the core of the dominion thesis that he had argued in 1773. Indeed, he improved upon his earlier argument by providing, at long last, a precise solution to the perplexity expressed by

Governor Hutchinson, who had told Massachusetts's legislators that he knew "of no Line that can be drawn between the Supreme Authority of Parliament and the total Independence of the Colonies." Because colonial charters did not grant to settlers any power "over the high seas," and because the colonists, in their several legislatures and in the First Continental Congress, had consented to the necessity and utility of Parliament's Navigation Acts, so long as they did not include duties on colonial imports, Novanglus declared that "here is a line fairly drawn between the rights of Britain and the rights of the colonies, viz. the banks of the ocean, or low water mark. The line of division between common law and civil, or maritime law." And in letters VIII through XII, Novanglus would mount the fullest defense of this thesis ever offered in America.[31]

Adams's novel definition of republicanism, however, served several purposes in 1775. First, he evidently saw no advantage in denying that the province of Massachusetts had become at least a quasi republic. That was becoming evident to local Whigs and Tories alike, even if they had only a vague notion of what a republic was. Thus, well after Massachusettensis leveled this accusation, in December 1774, Novanglus chose to bring up the charge in his letter IV, published in February, and essentially conceded the point by stating that Massachusettensis did not really understand what a republic was, but added that he would, at "another time," enlighten him. His eventual reply in letter VII—the long passage just quoted—although it made no reference to Massachusettensis, effectively parried his antagonist's argument by declaring that the government of Britain was also, in effect, a republic. Second, by defining a republic in a way that included any genuine constitutional monarchy, like Britain (but that excluded pseudo- or former constitutional monarchies, like France and Spain), he showed that Massachusetts's Whigs were doing no more than asserting their traditional rights under "the real constitution of Great Britain," the true British constitution, a concept he had used effectively in his "Clarendon" letters of 1766. Finally, Adams was determined to distinguish between a "British Empire" that was a suitable home for autonomous colonies whose inhabitants enjoyed the rights traditionally enjoyed by residents of a republic, and certain other nations, commonly called empires, whose absolute rulers exercised arbitrary power over their hapless subjects.[32]

The key to John Adams's new view of empires, monarchies, and republics, and of colonies and their parent nations, was a work that he had long known by reputation but had evidently acquired and studied only recently—James Harrington's *Commonwealth of Oceana*, published in London in 1655 during the regency of Oliver Cromwell. In letter VII, Adams quotes from *Oceana* three times before yoking Harrington with Aristotle and Livy as the ultimate authorities on the nature of republics. Harrington first instructed Novanglus that the Roman Republic settled its citizens in Italy and gave them full civic rights, but it knew better than to settle them abroad and risk alienating them. Only

under the emperors, who cared little for popular sentiment, did Rome plant its people outside Italy, where they had fewer rights. He next predicted that "the colonies in the Indies" (literally the West Indies in America, but probably including all European colonies in the Americas, of France and Spain as well as of England) would one day grow to maturity and seek their independence. And in contrast to Roman and English practice, he taught: "Absolute monarchy, as that of the Turks, neither plants its people at home or abroad, otherwise than as tenants for life or at will; wherefore its national and provincial government is all one." These pronouncements supported Adams's view that a system of parallel powers of government, established by a colonizing nation and its colonies, in conjunction with a national maritime policy set by the colonizing power over the open seas—up to "the banks of the ocean, or low water mark"—had proved and would continue to prove workable for the British Empire.[33]

Adams's last reference to Harrington, however, is the most important, for two reasons. First, *Oceana* supplied him with a neat definition of a republic—"a government of laws, and not of men"—that he would use again, both in his *Thoughts on Government* in 1776 and in his 1779 draft of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780. This aphorism encapsulated John Adams's view of what a sound, free government should be. Second, Harrington offered Adams something that Sidney and Locke could not: a clear link to the republican past. In contrast to the more speculative social contract theorists—a group that included Sidney as well as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau—Harrington's republicanism was deeply rooted in both the political theory and the political experience of ancient Greece and Rome, and of Renaissance Italy. His teachers were Aristotle, Polybius, Livy, and Machiavelli. Adams made no further use of Harrington and the republican tradition in *Novanglus* after letter VII, but from his *Thoughts on Government* in 1776 until he completed *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States* in 1787, Harrington's teachings and the tradition behind them lay at the center of John Adams's political writings.[34]

Novanglus devoted the remainder of letter VII to continuing his argument for the dominion basis of colonial autonomy. This led him, for the first time in these essays, to pay substantial attention to colonies south of Massachusetts. His objective was to establish the autonomy of several colonies at their initial settlement, primarily through their original or other early charters. He focused on Virginia, beginning in 1609, and on Maryland, from 1633, then returned northward to Plymouth, and then to Connecticut, before finishing with seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay. John Adams did not believe for a moment that any British North American colony lacked a solid claim to English liberties, but perhaps he thought that colonies founded early in the seventeenth century and granted charters made a stronger case for his argument. He also returned to the issue of commerce and insisted again that Parliament's regulation of trade per se was not a divisive issue in the imperial crisis, a point he had stressed by setting

the line between the political authority of Britain and that of its colonies at each colony's ocean shore.[35]

In letter VIII, one of the longest in the series, John Adams effected his last major thematic transition in the *Letters of Novanglus*. In the Massachusetts House of Representatives' two replies to Governor Hutchinson in 1773, he had made the case that the province owed its autonomy from Parliament to the fact that its founders had settled on dominion lands granted to them by King Charles I, that the king had confirmed their rights in the Massachusetts Bay Charter of 1629, and that by moving to North America, the settlers and their governing corporation had passed out of the English realm and therefore beyond any jurisdiction of Parliament. In letter VII, Novanglus had added just one important detail to the colonists' claim to autonomy, the concept of a clear line of division, the banks of the ocean, between parliamentary and provincial authority. But Adams had said nothing, beyond a few slight hints in 1773, about the temporal limitations, if any, of the original agreement between the monarch and his colonial subjects. In simpler terms, he had never considered either the king's or the settlers' right to withdraw from their agreement (beyond the settlers' universal and natural Lockean right to rebel against tyrannical authority).[36]

Letter VIII quickly supplied this deficiency. Because England's king had not conquered any part of North America and had not even—unlike some early settlers—paid native Americans for any part of it, Adams concluded that his only rights of colonization in the seventeenth century were to permit his English subjects to settle in America and to pledge to respect specified rights claimed by them in exchange for their voluntary pledge of allegiance to him. Novanglus neatly summarized his view of the original bounds of the English-American contract:

> [O]ur ancestors, when they emigrated, having obtained permission of the king to come here, and being never commanded to return into the realm, had a clear right to have erected in this wilderness a British constitution, or a perfect democracy, or any other form of government they saw fit. They indeed, while they lived, could not have taken arms against the king of England, without violating their allegiance, but their children would not have been born within the king's allegiance, would not have been natural subjects, and consequently not intitled to protection, or bound to the king.[37]

This meant, according to Novanglus, that the sole connection between Massachusetts and Great Britain was simply a bond between the province and the person of the king. Most important of all was his conviction that this was a voluntary bond, on both sides. Massachusetts, Adams argued, as well as New York, or Pennsylvania, or any other colony, was a distinct territory over which the king of Great Britain exercised a personal authority, by an agreement made between his royal ancestors and that colony's original settler ancestors, which

both the current monarch and the current colonists chose to observe by their agreement to abide by the royal charter of Massachusetts, or the corporate charters of Connecticut and Rhode Island, or the proprietary charters of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, or simply the instructions issued to the governor of each royal colony that had no active charter. In Novanglus's view, every one of these instruments of government was a voluntary political compact.[38]

For much of this long essay, Novanglus devoted his argument to proving both this point and the letter's opening statement, that the English common law made no provision for colonization, and therefore the colonists were free to adopt whatever part of common law, or any other law, they chose. The king, for his part, was free to approve whatever laws they adopted, but if he did not approve them and could not persuade the colonists to alter their laws, his only constitutional recourse—in Novanglus's argument, although not in current imperial practice—was to void the original compact and set the colonists free of his oversight and protection. In letter VIII, John Adams finally moved beyond the Lockean right of rebellion against tyranny and transformed the presumably inviolable dominion-based covenant between monarch and colonial subject into a voluntary agreement, revocable by either party.[39]

Adams devoted the substantial remainder of letter VIII and virtually all of letters IX through XII to proving these contentions. His method of argument was much like that he had used in his essays on judicial independence and in the Massachusetts legislature's replies to Governor Hutchinson, both in 1773, but with a few important differences. From this point to the end of the series, Novanglus focused almost exclusively on the British Isles; neither the American colonies nor the European continent played any significant role in his argument. Moreover, while he again presented a lawyer's case, salted with substantial passages in Latin, without translations, he turned his attention away from both the common law—which he had declared irrelevant to the subject of colonization—and the statute law, which would only elevate the historical role of Parliament.[40]

Instead, Novanglus recounted in great detail the relationship between England's monarch and several distinct British territories, especially Wales and Ireland. These nations shared three things in common. First, each came under the control of English kings only by a bloody conquest. Second, monarchs from Henry II in the twelfth century through Henry VIII in the sixteenth had struggled mightily to keep control of these border lands and island neighbors out of the hands of Parliament. Finally, both nations did eventually come under parliamentary authority, either through their incorporation into the English realm or, in the case of Ireland, through an explicit subjection both to laws passed by England's Parliament and to the English privy council's right to veto any law passed by Ireland's own parliament. Toward the end of letter VIII, Novanglus contrasted the political state of Britain's nearest dominions with the American

colonies by asking a series of questions. His queries illustrate the Americans' view that their consent to any incorporation of their colonies into the British realm was quite impossible:

> Was there ever any act of parliament, annexing, uniting, and consolidating any one of all the colonies to and with the realm of England or the kingdom of Great-Britain? 2. If any such act of parliament should be made, would it upon any principles of English laws and government, have any validity, without the consent, petition or supplication of the colonies? 3. Can any such union and incorporation, ever be made, upon any principles of English laws and government, without admitting representatives for the colonies in the house of commons, and American lords into the house of peers? 4. Would not representatives in the house of commons, unless they were numerous in proportion to the numbers of people in America, be a snare rather than a blessing? 5. Would Britain ever agree to a proportional number of American members, and if she would, could America afford the expense of them? 6. Could American representatives, possibly know the sense, the exigencies, &c. of their constituents, at such a distance, so perfectly as it is absolutely necessary legislators should know? 7. Could Americans ever come to the knowledge of the behaviour of their members, so as to dismiss the unworthy? 8. Would Americans in general, ever submit to septennial elections? 9. Have we not sufficient evidence, in the general frailty and depravity of human nature, and especially the experience we have had of Massachusettensis and the junto, that a deep, treacherous, plausible, corrupt minister, would be able to seduce our Members to betray us, as fast as we could send them?[41]

Novanglus opened letter IX with a brief aside to dismiss the argument for parliamentary supremacy just advanced in Joseph Galloway's *A Candid Examination of the Mutual Claims of Great Britain and the Colonies, with a Plan of Accommodation under Constitutional Principles* (1775). He then plunged into a thorough legal defense of his contention that the allegiance of the inhabitants of each British American colony was to the person of the monarch only, and not to the Crown—that is, to the monarch as the ruler of Great Britain, or of any political unit other than the colonists' particular province. His primary evidence was the body of judicial opinion concerning the nature of Scottish allegiance at two crucial points: following the accession to the English throne of James I, who was already James VI of Scotland (1604); and following the union of England (and Wales) with Scotland, to create the nation of Great Britain (1707). Summarizing Coke's and Moore's reports, which were endorsed by several other eminent jurists, Novanglus showed that the Scots owed their allegiance to their monarch independently of his or her rule over England, both before and after the union.[42]

The allegiance of the subject, therefore, was entirely to the monarch's person. "All the authorities in law," he argued, "coincide, exactly with the obser-

vation which I have heretofore made upon the case of Wales, and shew that subjection to the king of England, does not necessarily imply subjection to the crown of England; and that subjection to the crown of England, does not imply subjection to the parliament of England, for allegiance is due to the person of the king, and to that alone, in all three cases." His assertion naturally followed: "We do not admit any binding authority in the decisions and adjudications of the court of king's bench or common pleas, or the court of chancery [which had ruled, in 1774, that Parliament could unilaterally alter the Massachusetts Charter of 1691] over America: but we quote them as opinions of learned men. In these we find a distinction between a country conquered [as Wales or Ireland], and a country discovered." After further citations and summations, Novanglus concluded: The "binding force [of the monarch, in issuing charters or other documents under the Great Seal], both upon the crown and us, is wholly from compact and the law of nature."[43]

John Adams had now moved beyond the dominion basis of colonial American autonomy, which he had advocated from the Massachusetts legislature's reply to Governor Hutchinson in 1773 through Novanglus's letter VII, to advocate something far more radical. America's original autonomy, he concluded, did not depend on the fact—which he now denied—that British North America was part of the British monarch's dominions, rather than of the English (or Scottish, or British) realm, but solely upon the monarch's granting his subjects permission to settle in America and his recognition of their own governments there, in return for their continued allegiance to his person. America's current autonomy rested squarely upon the voluntary agreement of those settlers' descendants in America who, having not been born in any dominion lands of a British monarch, chose to continue that allegiance in exchange for the monarch's continued recognition of their government.

In letter X, Novanglus presented a chilling account of the alternative to America's freely given allegiance: the dependency of the conquered land of Ireland, through six centuries of subjection to English rule. Letter XI continued his lawyer's brief with further historical evidence from Ireland and Wales, and in letter XII he briefly recounted the constitutional histories of several smaller British dependencies that were eventually either incorporated into the British realm, with seats in Parliament, or brought under the thorough control of the Crown: the counties of Chester and Durham, the Isle of Man, and the Channel Islands (Guernsey and Jersey). All these lands, he asserted, were fundamentally different from America, because "America was not any part of the English realm or dominions." Adams concluded the *Letters of Novanglus* by restating the fundamental error that England had made in founding Massachusetts: the king had allowed the corporation of Massachusetts Bay to move from London to Boston, with its charter. "And as soon as they [i.e., the corporation members] arrived here, they got out of the English realm, dominions, state, empire, call it

by what name you will, and out of the legal jurisdiction of parliament. The king might, by his writ or proclamation, have commanded them [i.e., both the original corporation members and the accompanying settlers born in England] to return; but he did not."[44]

John Adams's *Novanglus* letters, despite their frequent passages of rhetorical brilliance, their steady progression from received to original political positions, and their enormous erudition, all devoted to the most thorough examination of America's constitutional relationship with Great Britain published before Independence, probably had little immediate effect on the course of the Revolution, even in the province of Massachusetts. Several of the letters were republished elsewhere in Massachusetts and in New Hampshire, from February through May 1775, but the whole series did not appear again in America until 1819, when two Boston printers paired the *Letters of Novanglus* with the *Letters of Massachusettensis* in a complete and authoritative edition. Novanglus's antagonist, however, was soon republished in pamphlet form, in Boston, New York, London, and Dublin.[45]

Comparative details of publication, of course, say little about the relative impact of each author on the course of the American Revolution, and even less about the relative quality of their arguments. Massachusettensis immediately became a hero to beleaguered Tory readers, who had few other prolific defenders, while Novanglus's defense of colonial autonomy needed no reprinting, anywhere in America, after Lexington and Concord. Moreover, the great majority of the people of Massachusetts had been in full agreement with the principal argument of his first six letters, that Parliament had no legitimate authority over Massachusetts, from that day in June 1774 when the Massachusetts Government Act appeared in Boston.

In part for this reason, the foregoing analysis of the *Letters of Novanglus* has paid less attention to Massachusettensis's arguments than Adams did himself. This newspaper duel was lopsided from the outset. Massachusettensis's potential audience was never large, and Novanglus's active readership may have been no larger, but Massachusettensis's powerful Tory allies—Sir Francis Bernard, Thomas Hutchinson, George Grenville (the late) Charles Townshend, Lord Hillsborough, Lord North, and (although not yet popularly acknowledged) King George III—had ensured that for every reader Novanglus attracted his defense of American autonomy had a hundred supporters. Moreover, the Massachusettensis-Novanglus duel never became a fully developed exchange of views. Novanglus engaged only the first six of Massachusettensis's letters, which had all appeared before Novanglus's first letter. Massachusettensis acknowledged Novanglus in just a few of his later essays, and he never attempted to engage his antagonist's legal and historical arguments. And, of course, Adams remained in the dark about Massachusettensis's true identity, although everyone seemed to know who Novanglus was immediately.[46]

The importance of the *Letters of Novanglus*, like that of virtually every set of essays that Adams had written before it—but of far fewer of his writings thereafter—lies not in their impact on any particular audience, either in 1775 or later, but in their development of political ideas that he would shortly introduce on a larger stage, at the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia, and in the press in that city. In January 1775, when he began his *Novanglus* letters, he still believed that a republican form of government, which he found increasingly appealing since his oration at Braintree in 1772, remained somehow distant from the English-speaking world. Both Braintree and the province of Massachusetts bore unmistakable similarities to republics, but Adams was not ready to call them republics. By mid-February, when Novanglus wrote his fourth letter, Massachusettensis's earlier charge that Massachusetts Whigs had created a republic evidently gave him pause. By letter VII, he was ready to announce that not only the province of Massachusetts but Great Britain itself was in essence a republic. This radical redefinition of existing government in both Britain and British North America gave Congressman John Adams the foundation on which to create a reformed constitutional system that he would recommend to his congressional colleagues over the course of the next year, for use in their home colonies.[47]

The transformation in John Adams's view of the ultimate basis of colonial autonomy over the course of preparing his *Novanglus* letters was just as profound. In January 1775, he apparently still believed that the colonies' owed their autonomy from Britain's Parliament to their original establishment in royal dominion lands outside the English realm. The inhabitants in such lands, like all men everywhere, according to sound Lockean principles, enjoyed a natural right of revolution against tyranny, but short of that provocation, they lived in an unbreakable relationship with their sovereign. The principal objective of Patriot leaders, from the Stamp Act crisis in 1765 to the First Continental Congress in 1774, had been to determine and establish a defensible line of division between British and colonial authority, and in letter VII Novanglus proposed a clear line—the western shore of the Atlantic Ocean.

In letter VIII, however, Adams suddenly changed course. The bond between the British sovereign and the British American subject, he concluded, was not based on the relationship between the sovereign and any North American territory, which, as discovered rather than conquered or purchased land, was not in fact dominion land at all. Instead, the bond was a voluntary compact between the British monarch and British American colonists. This cast the right of either party to remain in that bonded state in a new light. Adams, like virtually every rebelling colonist, undoubtedly believed there should be sound justification for any dissolution of the imperial bond, but in his new, anti-imperial vision, the right of revolution, already asserted in the not-too-distant pronouncement of John Locke, suddenly moved to America's shore. John Adams was neither arguing for

independence in *Novanglus* nor consciously preparing for it. But he was conveying his own allegiance to Britain's monarch to a new venue, from which independence would no longer appear so remote as it had quite recently for this loyal subject of the British Empire.[48]

4. Lexington and Concord

The clashes between British regulars and Massachusetts militiamen at Lexington and Concord on 19 April 1775 are too well known and have been too frequently retold, often with high drama and in great detail, to need another telling here, quite aside from the fact that John Adams played no part, direct or indirect, in the events of that day. His only physical connection with the scene was a brief but moving journey along the battle road a few days after the conflict, just prior to his departure for Philadelphia to attend the Second Continental Congress. But the larger significance of Lexington and Concord merits some comment, for several reasons.[49]

First, Lexington and Concord instantly changed America's political landscape, in a single day in Massachusetts, then in every British colony south to Georgia, almost as fast as the news could travel. Before 19 April 1775, most of the colonies were in a state of widespread political protest, and Massachusetts was in civil rebellion, that is, a refusal to recognize and submit to the authority of regularly appointed officials and the established institutions of government over which they presided. By early May, every colony either was in an active state of armed rebellion or was desperately taking measures to put itself under arms. This irrevocably altered the roles of town and county governments, of local judicial systems, of provincial congresses and conventions, and of the Second Continental Congress. After Lexington and Concord there appeared to be no going back; if the British Empire were to retain its full strength in North America, Great Britain would have to restructure the imperial connection. But how could a single day of violence, in one colony, have had such a great effect?[50]

One answer may lie in the psychological state of the thousands of militiamen who fought on that day, and of the hundreds of thousands of colonists who learned of the battle over the next few weeks. When more than seven hundred British regulars marched into the Massachusetts countryside in the early morning of 19 April, the outcome of their expedition was not an entirely foregone conclusion. Even after the handful of deaths at Lexington and Concord on that morning, the militia captains and their men might have decided to settle for the kind of propaganda victory the Patriots had won following the Boston Massacre by urging their men to let the British, who had only a modest success in destroying Patriot ammunition that day, return to Boston largely unharmed but condemned as murderers in the public mind.[51]

But whatever the mood of the rapidly assembling militia might have been before the first fatal shots were fired at Lexington Green, or even as late as the

brief but again fatal confrontation at Concord's North Bridge, by the time the retreating British column reached Merriam's Corner, just a mile east of Concord, something in the temper of the militia units that were following the regulars had changed. Perhaps it was, as it may have been in Boston on 16 December 1773, a sudden exhaustion of patience after years of feeling that their liberties were threatened. Perhaps also, it was a realization that they were fighting on their home ground, miles from any British warships or artillery, and finally had a clear numerical advantage, even over a sizable contingent of the British army. Whatever went through their minds, they began a withering fire on the troops marching toward them, marching by them, and even marching away from them, many with their muskets shouldered, a fire that continued with varying intensity for some six hours over fifteen miles, from Concord to Cambridge, until darkness and the proximity of British warships in Boston Harbor finally quieted the Patriots' rage.[52]

What made this psychological turning point significant was the immediate response of nearly every community from Maine to Georgia. Thousands of men of all ages endorsed the zealous temper of Massachusetts's militiamen by taking up their own arms. A new chapter in America's relationship with Britain had begun; the fact that armed rebellion had occurred must now be confronted and acknowledged in devising whatever solution could be found to their old feud. Not all Patriots would have applauded the sentiment attributed to Samuel Adams, who, upon hearing the distant gunfire at Lexington Green, exclaimed: "This is a glorious morning for America!" But all knew that, for good or ill, a new day had dawned.[53]

Finally, Lexington and Concord had a direct impact on the future of John Adams's *Letters of Novanglus* and the ideas that he developed in those essays. Adams's expansive defense of the colonies' autonomy would play an important role in America's intellectual justification for declaring independence from Great Britain, and his renewed interest in republican government would become fundamental both to America's embrace of republicanism and to his own later political thought. But the first effect of America's turn to armed rebellion was to curtail any immediate influence that the *Letters of Novanglu*s might have had on the American public, and to defer the development of the ideas he expressed there for several months. Constitutional thought, even in John Adams's own mind, receded into the background as Congress created the Continental army and prepared for war.

5. A Patriotic Transformation

The eight months between the convening of the First and the Second Continental Congress saw a remarkable political transformation in Massachusetts. The royal province of the early summer of 1774 became a functioning autonomous republic by midfall, an armed republic by winter, and a republic in armed

rebellion by early spring. Its nominal source of political authority was still that traditional union of monarch and provincial legislature as defined in its royal charter, which its people had known and accepted for more than eighty years. But King George III, his ministers, his governor in Boston, and the whole apparatus of the British Crown (not to mention the thoroughly discredited British Parliament) had no authority beyond the range of British naval cannon in Boston Harbor, and of musket fire and bayonets wherever Governor Gage was brave enough to send his troops. Real authority now derived from the people, exercised directly in their town meetings and militia companies, briefly delegated to several county conventions in August and September, and finally entrusted to three successive provincial congresses, from October 1774 through June 1775. Massachusetts was far from being a perfected republic; it lacked both an executive and a judicial system. It therefore had no means of enforcing any laws or implementing any policies, beyond the moral suasion of appeals to patriotic virtue, which, however, proved surprisingly effective.

In a slightly shorter period, just under six months between his return to Massachusetts after the adjournment of the First Continental Congress in late October 1774 and his departure for Philadelphia in late April 1775 to attend the Second Continental Congress, John Adams effected a transformation in his own political thought fully as remarkable as the transformation of his province in its politics. The principal vehicle for this transformation was his *Letters of Novanglus*, the longest series of political essays written by any Patriot author in the decade before American Independence, and Adams's longest work before the late 1780s. The importance of *Novanglus*, unlike that of Jonathan Dickinson's *Letters of a Pennsylvania Farmer* or Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, was not in its impact upon its readers. *Novanglus* had few American readers outside Massachusetts until well after the era of the American Revolution had ended, and its influence on Massachusetts readers in 1775, beyond a simple reinforcement of local Patriot beliefs, is quite uncertain.[54]

The impact of *Novanglus* upon its author, however, was immediate and profound. The historical and legal research and the labor of thought and expression that John Adams expended on his longest Revolutionary text finally provided him with assured answers for two of the questions that were most troubling to British America's rebelling colonies in the year prior to Independence. First, did they have a sound legal basis for breaking with the British Empire to become independent states, if they decided that the defense of their liberties compelled them to do so? And, second, was there a political system that could assure them sound governments for those independent states?[55]

Much of the text of *Novanglus*'s first seven letters answered the first question by perfecting the argument that Adams had been making for two years, that the colonists' political autonomy within the British Empire derived from their history as settlers and descendants of settlers on dominion lands that had

never been brought under the sovereignty of Parliament. In letters VIII through XII, however, evidently as a result of examining the history of the subject's allegiance to the monarch in medieval and early modern England, Wales, and Scotland, Adams abruptly altered his argument. The colonists' autonomy, he now declared, owed simply to their allegiance to the person of the monarch. All British subjects born in America, he asserted, swore their allegiance voluntarily, and only to the person of the monarch, who was their sole constitutional link to the British Empire. The essential element of this allegiance was freely given consent. In taking this position, Adams accorded to all British Americans the right to terminate their allegiance to their monarch at any time of their choosing, and to claim, with full legal and historical authority, their status as free men in free, self-governing societies, a status that they could rightfully expect the world to recognize.

Novanglus's answer to the second question was to embrace republicanism, whose intricacies John Adams had been exploring intermittently for at least three years, as the only proper political tradition for a free government. In the fall of 1775, Adams would argue in Congress that every American colony should adopt a republican form of government, even though it did not then intend to leave the British Empire. This exhortation followed from his conclusion, in letter VII of *Novanglus*, that every man who wished to live free could only live in a republic. And in April 1776, in *Thoughts on Government*, Adams would express the matter in just these terms, declaring that England's most eminent political authorities all agreed that "there is no good government, but what is republican."[56]

On 26 April 1775, finally assured of his right, and the right of every American, to live under a government that he, and they, could design without interference from any man in Britain, including George III, and equally convinced that only a republican form of government would guarantee him and his countrymen the freedom they sought, Adams set off for Philadelphia. There, on the floor of Congress, in private conversations with congressional colleagues, in meetings with local political leaders, in his correspondence with Massachusetts friends and colleagues, and in print, he would advocate a republican form of government for every colony and, in 1776, would work tirelessly for the independence of every colony from its imperial executive, King George III.

V

Building a Republican Orthodoxy

1775–1776

A man must be indifferent to the sneers of modern Englishmen to mention in their company the names of Sidney, Harrington, Locke, Milton, Nedham, Neville, Burnet, and Hoadley. No small fortitude is necessary to confess that one had read them. . . . [But] the wretched condition of this country . . . has frequently reminded me of their principles and reasonings. They will convince any candid mind, that there is no good government but what is Republican.

Thoughts on Government, *April 1776*

In may 1775, John Adams shifted virtually all his energies to the national stage, where he quickly became a leading member of the Second Continental Congress. For most of that year, the pressing need for Congress to direct the colonies' armed defense demanded Adams's full attention, but by October he was again thinking about republics, and now in a more confident, concise, and structural way than he ever had done before. The period from January 1773 through April 1775 had been his time to discover and expound the ultimate foundations of provincial autonomy in British North America and to determine the general character that America's autonomous governments should take. He finally resolved both issues to his satisfaction in his *Letters of Novanglus*. From June 1775 through April 1776, Adams gradually constructed a common republican plan for America, a design for government that every colony might employ, whether it chose to remain in the British Empire or to become an independent state. When he had perfected this republican orthodoxy, in his short, anonymous pamphlet, *Thoughts on Government*, Adams was ready to take the last step, to persuade his colleagues in Congress that America's newly reformed young republics must be independent of the British Empire.

Adams's campaign to devise a model republican government and sell it to his countrymen went through three stages. During the opening session of the Second Continental Congress in the spring of 1775, he expressed his strong

preference for governments that had a single executive, two legislative houses, and an independent judiciary, but he conveyed these sentiments to just a few congressional colleagues, off the floor of Congress. In the only case during this session of a colony seeking Congress's advice on reforming a government that had been weakened by the disorder of the rebellion, that of his own province, Massachusetts Bay, he evidently deferred to a plan developed by other Massachusetts leaders, even though he privately hinted that he did not think it was ideal.

In October and November 1775, Adams grew bolder. His strong performance in committee at the First Continental Congress in the fall of 1774, and perhaps also his role in shaping the Massachusetts assembly's replies to Governor Hutchinson in 1773 and his *Novanglus* essays in early 1775, had earned him a reputation as Congress's most profound constitutional authority. When New Hampshire sought congressional advice in reforming its government, Adams responded by introducing his own conception of republicanism on the floor of Congress. As the debate progressed, he tried to convince his colleagues that the time was ripe to recommend a common republican plan to every colony that needed to establish a government that would be independent of all British authority. In contentious debates on the floor that continued in committee sessions, Adams failed to achieve this broad objective, but he did persuade Congress to issue a general encouragement to New Hampshire to reform its government. The delegates instructed New Hampshire, and then South Carolina, to establish such governments as their elected representatives believed would "in their Judgment . . . best produce the happiness of the People, and most effectually secure Peace and good Order in the Province."[1] Congress was not yet ready to recommend any specific plan of government to any colony or to endorse a common plan for all colonies. But Adams had sowed the seeds of constitutional reform more effectively than he knew. A succinct statement of his ideas, which he wrote out for Congressman Richard Henry Lee in November, would point the way toward a more productive season of constitutional reform in the new year.

In March 1776, several congressmen from provinces that were considering reforming their governments asked John Adams for his constitutional advice. In letters directed to delegates from North Carolina, Virginia, and New Jersey, Adams made his case for creating strong single executives and bicameral legislatures, and for establishing an independent judiciary. In April, Richard Henry Lee took one of these letters to a printer, who quickly produced the shortest, most effective pamphlet of Adams's career, entitled *Thoughts on Government*. This anonymous tract effectively expressed Adams's constitutional thought in 1776; it became the first complete expression of America's new republican orthodoxy and may have influenced the structure of new constitutions in up to half a dozen states.

Immediately upon completing *Thoughts on Government*, Adams plunged into the congressionally led campaign to persuade several reluctant colonies to support independence from Great Britain. In this contentious struggle, John Adams made two singular contributions. The first was his 15 May Preamble to Congress's 10 May Resolve, which together urged every province to form a new government that would suppress any allegiance to the British Crown. The second was his reply of 1 July 1776, on the floor of Congress, to John Dickinson's last impassioned argument against independence. This address, and Congress's vote for Independence the following day, essentially completed the first stage of America's republican movement.

1. Adams Emerges as Congress's Constitutional Authority

Although he was suffering from a fever, Adams left Braintree in a small carriage on 26 April, caught up with Massachusetts's other congressional delegates at Hartford three days later, and reached Philadelphia by 10 May, just as the Second Continental Congress began its deliberations. He attended faithfully until the next adjournment on 1 August and immediately returned home, but he was back in Philadelphia by 12 September for the next session. Thereafter, Congress sat without significant breaks through Independence and the ensuing war with Britain. Adams attended until early December 1775 and, after a brief winter break in Massachusetts, was back in Philadelphia by early February 1776, where he remained until October. In 1775 he kept no journal or any other record of Congress's May to August session, but he resumed his diary in September, and from that point on, between his irregular but often quite detailed diary entries, several important recollections in his autobiography, and his rapidly expanding correspondence, both personal and public, the surviving record of his thoughts and deeds is among the fullest and most intimate for any public figure in Revolutionary America.[2]

The new Congress's first session faced as great a challenge, to create a united Continental defense, as any American Congress would ever face, and its official *Journal* shows Adams heavily engaged in its work. His most memorable act was his nomination, on 15 June 1775, of George Washington to be commander in chief of the new Continental army. In the midst of coping with national defense, however, Congress paused briefly to address a matter that was close to John Adams's heart—the condition and prospects of Massachusetts's Revolutionary government. In taking on this responsibility, Congress set a precedent in its relations with the colonies (soon to be states) that would be of the first importance in the current war effort, in America's rapidly evolving federal system of government, and in the development of John Adams's constitutional thought.

From October 1774 through May 1775, Massachusetts had made do with successive provincial congresses. In their election and basic operations, these

bodies approximated the official House of Representatives that had, without a governor willing to work with the legislators on their terms, been unable to function since June 1774. Through sheer necessity, the provincial congresses had taken on the regulation and supply of the militia and its elite "minutemen" corps that defended the countryside so effectively on 19 April. But the province had no executive, council, or functioning court system. In the winter of 1775, John Adams was deeply impressed, indeed astonished, at the good order of the people, who, for the first time in their lives, had no effective governor over them, and no courts to settle their disputes. But he did not believe this truncated government could keep public order forever. His neighbors agreed, and on 16 May, after having formally repudiated Governor Thomas Gage, Massachusetts's Third Provincial Congress petitioned the Second Continental Congress to suggest a remedy for its political difficulties.[3]

In early June, Congress took up Massachusetts's request, and after a debate in which John Adams played a leading role, it formally advised the province to establish a more complete government that could command the full respect of the people by reinstating the structure of the legislature that had existed before the Massachusetts Government Act. By midsummer, the nascent "republic of Massachusetts" became a fully functioning reality, although it still lacked the name of a republic. The province promptly elected a new House of Representatives, which in turn elected a new Council (to which it named Adams and his four congressional colleagues as members). The two revived houses of the General Court then declared that the office of governor was vacant. This allowed the Council, under a provision of the Charter of 1691, which the lawmakers now formally reauthorized, to take on executive functions. In August, the General Court gave the force of law to the resolutions passed by the three provincial congresses during the past year. In October the legislators formally restored the court system and appointed John Adams to be the new chief justice of the Superior Court.[4]

In the fall of 1775, the political forces that had prompted Massachusetts's request for constitutional guidance from the Second Continental Congress spread both north and south. Royal authority was now collapsing in one province after another, and the ensuing void threatened the operation of the most vital legislative, executive, and judicial functions on which the good order of their societies depended. Everywhere local leaders were debating whether they should simply reform existing political institutions or must create new ones to secure the obedience and respect of their people. Many congressmen, particularly from the middle and southern colonies, still hoped that the British Empire could be restored in America on honorable terms, but they feared that any reconciliation would not happen soon. As they waited to see if Britain would make a favorable response to their last conciliatory overture, Congress's July 1775 "Olive Branch" petition to the king, anxious letters from their constituents

called out for guidance. All wanted to know what form their interim governments should take in order to best protect the stability of their societies and support a vigorous defense of America.[5]

As the colonies' constitutional anxiety deepened, John Adams emerged as the central figure in Congress's attempt to address it. Before assessing his role in this vital process, however, it is worth asking how he came to take this prominent part. His own province, of course, had been coping with constitutional issues for more than a year, and Adams had joined his neighbors in confronting these issues between his absences to serve in Congress. But even Massachusetts's new government, inaugurated in July 1775, was an interim solution that left several questions unanswered. And the manner in which congressmen from other colonies learned of Adams's constitutional expertise is not immediately evident. They could have heard of the prominent part he played in the exchange between Massachusetts's House of Representatives and Governor Hutchinson in 1773, but this is far from certain. Several congressmen may have been familiar with his *Novanglus* letters, but as these essays had not been published in any colony outside New England, this, too, remains doubtful. Any knowledge of his earlier political writings must have been very slight. Other Massachusetts congressmen—his cousin, Samuel Adams, perhaps—may have sung his praises in constitutional matters, but this, too, remains unproven.[6]

But John Adams could count on one persuasive spokesman for his abilities and his ideas—himself. Many returning congressmen undoubtedly remembered that in the fall of 1774, he had performed impressively on the First Congress's committee on colonial rights. In June 1775, he had risen to implore the Second Congress to authorize a stronger government in Massachusetts. When he returned to Philadelphia in September, after a month's break and his first Council service in Massachusetts, he heard his colleagues' conversations turn increasingly to the uneasy state of their newly autonomous colonies. Adams seized this opportunity to present his legal and political knowledge. He also had two advantages he lacked in the previous session of Congress. First, his general health and his eyesight, both poor in the spring and summer, were now much improved. Second, every week that passed without news of a positive response from London to Congress's Olive Branch petition made America's congressmen more willing to authorize political change in the colonies to stiffen the resistance effort.[7]

Congress's first opportunity to promote the creation of stronger provisional governments in colonies that were not yet directly threatened by British forces arrived in mid-October, in a petition from Massachusetts's northern neighbor, New Hampshire. That province was struggling with the same problems that had plagued Massachusetts in the spring, the lack of a "Method for our Administering Justice, and regulating our civil police" that could command popular respect. New Hampshire's October petition for guidance touched off several

days of spirited debate before Congress could even appoint a five-man committee to bring in a response. And the committee itself, although composed of John Adams and four other members who all wanted to encourage New Hampshire to form a new government, wrestled with the issue for another week before reporting a resolution to the floor. Adopted by Congress on 3 November 1775, that resolve showed no trace of its contentious creation or any obvious sign that it was, indeed, a triumph for the chamber's more radical members:

> Resolved, That it be recommended to the provincial Convention of New Hampshire, to call a full and free representation of the People, and that the Representatives if they think it necessary, establish such a form of Government, as in their Judgment will best produce the happiness of the People, and most effectually secure Peace and good Order in the Province, during the Continuance of the present dispute between Great Britain and the Colonies.[8]

But Congress's struggle to pass this bland text was genuinely contentious, and hugely significant. Massachusetts's request for guidance from Congress in May was quite similar to that of New Hampshire, but would have been far more difficult for Congress to reject. Massachusetts's Charter of 1691 had been unilaterally altered by Parliament, and the British regiments that occupied Boston were besieged by thousands of local militia. Congress, whatever it thought of the political implications of the province's request, could not allow the slightest chance of civil disorder to undermine the military effort that it was just beginning to organize and direct. Delegates from several colonies were reluctant to do so much for New Hampshire. To comply with that province's wishes would create two precedents: that Congress would accept some responsibility for the internal governance of any colony that sought it; and that all the colonies would be formally encouraged to base any changes in their governments upon "a full and free representation of the People."

Neither idea was radical in the fall of 1775. Some degree of confederation had become an established fact from the moment the First Continental Congress approved the Continental Association in October 1774; that provisional union became much stronger with the creation of the Continental army in June 1775. And "the People" had been the foundation of political power in Connecticut and Rhode Island for more than a century, and became the de facto basis of government in Massachusetts no later than the defiant response to Governor Hutchinson by over a hundred town meetings and their committees of correspondence in the fall and winter of 1772–73. "The People" had also been the theoretical foundation of all good government for John Adams since his oration at Braintree in May 1772. But Congress's decision to extend political guidance to colonies that were not yet actually threatened by British arms implied a stronger federal bond than many provincials were quite ready to accept, and its formal endorsement of the popular basis of government implied a closer embrace of

republican principles than many Americans were quite ready to acknowledge. As a still new political body, Congress had good reason to be cautious about imposing its ideas on its thirteen constituents, even at their request.[9]

When the debate opened, however, John Adams immediately rose to explain why Congress must grant New Hampshire's request. His overriding motive was not his wish to promote a republican form of government in New Hampshire or anywhere else, but his determination to encourage every province to create a government that could more effectively support the rebellion, in part by acknowledging that the ultimate political foundation of that government must be its own people rather than any person or institution, including King George III, that was connected with the British Empire. He probably also believed that the reform of colonial governments would hasten America's total independence from Britain, which he had evidently favored since June 1775.[10]

But Adams was still willing to be persuaded by events that the colonies could retain their liberties within the empire, a goal toward which stronger provincial governments were, he believed, essential. Looking back at the debate over New Hampshire's petition after three decades, he judged the outcome as only a partial victory. But his own prior performance in Congress, and certain facts on the ground, strongly favored his cause. He had built up political capital in both the First and Second Continental Congresses, so that by October 1775 he could count on powerful allies outside New England, notably Richard Henry Lee of Virginia and John Rutledge of South Carolina. And Congress had that very month sent a delegation to Massachusetts to consult with local representatives from that province, and from Connecticut, Rhode Island, *and* New Hampshire, to develop a coordinated defense against Britain throughout New England.[11]

The triumph of Adams and his like-minded colleagues on 3 November 1775 quickly brought an unexpected reward. Adams remembered, in somewhat exaggerated language, that John Rutledge, a member of the committee that recommended Congress's response to New Hampshire, "was now compleatly with Us, in our desire of revolutionizing all the Governments, and he brought forward immediately, some representations from his own State" for similar guidance that same day. Congress, now that it had resolved the basic question for New Hampshire, promptly appointed another committee, with all new members, but including Samuel Adams and four southern delegates sympathetic to South Carolina's request. On the following day the committee reported a resolve that repeated the advice to New Hampshire almost word for word, and Congress approved it.[12]

John Adams should have been satisfied with these two votes. Congress, after approving a stronger government for a colony on the edge of the war zone, had immediately agreed to a similar request from another colony that was still far removed from the armed conflict. But he remembered that in the debates he

had tried "to get the Resolution enlarged and extended into a Recommendation to the People of all the States to institute Governments." Several members then asked him, "What Plan of Government would you recommend?" This gave him pause, because he believed that if Congress opened a full debate on the proper form of government to recommend to the several colonies, most of the members, including his friends and political allies, "had at that time no other Idea of any other Government but a Contemptible Legislature in one assembly, with Committees for Executive Magistrates and Judges."[13]

To fend off this disaster, Adams remembered in his autobiography, he answered:

> [B]y Sporting off hand, a variety of short Sketches of Plans, which might be adopted by the Conventions, and as this Subject was brought into View in some Way or other, almost every day and these Interrogations were frequently repeated, I had in my head and at my Tongues End, as many Projects of Government as Mr. Burke says the Abby Seieyes had in his Pidgeon holes, not however constructed at such Length nor laboured with his metaphysical Refinements. I took care however always to bear my Testimony against every plan of an unbalanced Government.

But after making little headway against the prevailing Revolutionary prejudice against bicameral legislatures, strong executives, and independent judges, he finally abandoned his attempt to persuade Congress to urge all the colonies to reform their governments.[14]

Adams did believe that Congress's resolution of advice to New Hampshire was "a Tryumph and a most important Point gained." But he would have been happier if the resolve's last clause, "during the Continuance of the present dispute between Great Britain and the Colonies," had been omitted, for two reasons. First, he hoped that any reformation of government in New Hampshire, and in South Carolina and every other colony, would become permanent, whether America stayed in the British Empire or left it. And by the time the committee thrashed out the final wording of the resolve, Adams "mortally hated the Words 'Province' 'Colonies' and Mother Country and strove to get them out of the Report." He did get "Mother Country" removed, but "provinces" and "colonies" stayed in. Perhaps it was Adams's aversion to all subordinate language, as much as time's inevitable wounds to memory, that prompted him to substitute the anachronistic "state" for "province" and "colony" in his autobiographical recounting of the whole event.[15]

But Congress's deliberations on colonial government from 18 October through 4 November, both in plenary sessions and in committee, would soon yield a handsome profit for John Adams as a political theorist. From the abrupt termination of his *Novanglus* letters in mid-April until the presentation of New Hampshire's petition to Congress in mid-October, he had devoted little thought

to constitutional issues. Massachusetts's request for guidance from Congress in May 1775 evidently did not prompt an extended debate., which was fortunate for Adams, given his poor health at that season. But New Hampshire's challenge to Congress forced him to resume the search for an effective republican form of government that he had begun in 1772. The ensuing debate secured John Adams's reputation as Congress's premier authority on political constitutions, even if the balanced government that he favored was not yet popular with his colleagues.

Eleven days after Congress voted its resolve for South Carolina, John Adams produced the briefest sketch for republican government he would ever write. The body of his two-page letter of 15 November to Richard Henry Lee is a series of short paragraphs, most only a sentence long, that present his favored definitions and formulas for all the basic elements of a reformed colonial government that would be effective in supporting a vigorous rebellion against Great Britain, but equally effective in a state of total independence from the British Empire. Provisions for elections, the structure of a bicameral legislature, the nature and powers of the executive, and the independence of the judiciary all appear in succinct form. Three features of this sketch are particularly notable. The first is its close resemblance to Massachusetts's Charter of 1691, which was probably the only colonial constitution that Adams knew well in the fall of 1775. The second is his recommendation that "the Governor, Council, and House be each a distinct and independent Branch of the Legislature, and have a Negative on all Laws." This was a central conviction of Adams's political philosophy and would become a critical issue when he came to draft the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 nearly four years later. Finally, Adams assured Lee that his plan "may be varied in any one particular an infinite Number of Ways, So as to accommodate it to the different Genius, Temper, Principles and even Prejudices of different People."[16]

The thematic connection between Adams's November 1775 letter to Richard Henry Lee and his *Thoughts on Government*, written and published just over four months later, has long been recognized. All the structural features of government are virtually identical in the brief sketch and the longer, but still succinct, pamphlet. Adams's declaration of his plan's easy adaptability to any American colony appears prominently in both texts. But while the letter's bright future has been thoroughly appreciated, its immediate context has been less well understood. The letter lacks a letter's traditional opening, a reference of some kind to either its recipient or its author, and reads more like an epistle designed for publication or the opening of a pamphlet. Only at the end do we learn how this text came to be directed to Lee: "As you was last Evening polite enough to ask me for this Model, if such a Trifle will be of any service to you, or any gratification of Curiosity, here you have it." And in fact Lee circulated copies of Adams's letter among political friends, and it eventually made its way to

England, and to Virginia, where it appeared as a handbill in Purdie's *Virginia Gazette* on 10 May 1776, in time for it to have, in all probability, some influence on the construction of Virginia's Constitution of 1776.[17]

But it is this letter's highly impersonal introduction, not its personal conclusion, that explains how and why it came into existence: "The Course of Events, naturally turns the Thoughts of Gentlemen to the Subjects of Legislation and Jurisprudence, and it is a curious Problem what Form of Government, is most readily and easily adopted by a Colony, upon a Sudden Emergency. Nature and Experience have already pointed out the Solution of this Problem, in the Choice of Conventions and Committees of safety. Nothing is wanting in Addition to these to make a compleat Government, but the Appointment of Magistrates for the due Administration of Justice."[18]

This paragraph re-creates the dramatic scene on 18 October, when New Hampshire's Provincial Convention sought Congress's advice in creating a stronger government. After considerable agonizing, Congress responded much as Adams characterizes the solution here, by advising the colony's provincial convention to announce a plan for appointing magistrates for the due administration of justice. Richard Henry Lee had been one of Adams's most important allies in the debates on that issue and had heard firsthand Adams's host of plans for colonial governments. In the days following the debates, Lee decided that he wanted his colleague's thoughts in written form. Adams obliged, and from the "many Projects of Government" that were "in my head and at my Tongue's End" during the debates, he distilled for Lee several of the essential elements that would appear again in April 1776, in *Thoughts on Government*.

All that Adams lacked, on 15 November 1775, was a larger theoretical and historical framework for these basic elements of constitutional construction. For these he would need to return to his favorite republican authors, especially Algernon Sidney and James Harrington, whom he had been reading and quoting the previous winter in his *Letters of Novanglus*. In early December, he asked Congress for permission to return to Massachusetts. He was "worn down with long and uninterrupted Labour" and wanted to see his family. He had also just accepted the position of chief justice of the Superior Court of Massachusetts, despite some misgivings, but he had yet to hear whether Massachusetts's legislators really wanted him to fill this position or would prefer that he return to Congress. And perhaps he missed his republican library, which he would soon put to good use, again. On 9 December, John Adams left Philadelphia for Braintree. He would not return until February 1776.[19]

2. *Thoughts on Government*

John Adams's winter break in 1775–76 was brief but busy. Massachusetts's reformed popular regime, in operation since mid-July, was already displaying the usual behavior of a bicameral legislature: a disagreement between the new

Council and the House of Representatives that had elected it. Adams arrived in Braintree on 21 December, and on 26 December, or shortly thereafter, he took his seat on the Council, which was then sitting at Watertown. He evidently spent much of the next month there, and after a final visit to Braintree, departed for Philadelphia from Watertown on 25 January 1776. In these few weeks he served on several committees, and as a member of the Continental Congress he also consulted several times with General Washington and other officers on strategic matters. His most personal challenge, however, was to decide whether he should accept another term in Congress and, if he did, whether the newly revived provincial court system could function without his presence as chief justice.[20]

Even before he reached Massachusetts, the General Court (the combined House of Representatives and Council) had elected Adams to another term in Congress by 126 of 129 possible votes. The legislature also reelected overwhelmingly his close allies John Hancock and Samuel Adams, who shared his conviction that a final break with Great Britain was unavoidable, and added Elbridge Gerry, another supporter of independence, to their number. But the obstructive Robert Treat Paine barely survived the vote, and the legislators dropped the cautious Thomas Cushing from the delegation. John Adams could now, if he chose, return to Congress as part of a zealous, harmonious delegation.[21]

Sometime before 18 January 1776, Adams accepted his reappointment to Congress. On 19 January, as the dominant member of a Council drafting committee, he sent down to the House for its approval the text of "A Proclamation by the General Court." This document, which was evidently largely if not entirely of Adams's creation, was approved without change on 23 January and ordered to be read at the opening of every superior and inferior session of the new court system created by the General Court in 1775, and at the opening of every annual town meeting in March. Nor did the legislators hesitate to recommend its reading by every minister in the province at the end of Sunday services. The proclamation opened with a succinct statement of the foundation of any free—and patently republican—government:

> The frailty of human Nature [and] the Wants of Individuals . . . have in all Ages, and in every Country impelled them to form Societies, and establish Governments.
>
> As the Happiness of the People, is the sole End of Government, So the Consent of the People is the only Foundation of it, in Reason, Morality, and the natural Fitness of things: and therefore every Act of Government, every Exercise of Sovereignty, against, or without, the Consent of the People, is Injustice, Usurpation, and Tyranny.
>
> It is a Maxim, that in every Government, there must exist Somewhere, a Supreme, Sovereign, absolute, and uncontroulable Power: But this power resides always in the Body of the People.[22]

The proclamation then summarized Britain's recent assault on the Massachusetts charter and the tyrannical behavior of the royal administration as justification for the decision, by the Third Provincial Congress in June 1775, to create a new legislature based on the authority of the people, and to declare the governor's chair vacant. After briefly recounting the creation of an army for the province's defense and the appointment of judges to administer justice, the text closed with an appeal to all the inhabitants of the province to show the "Piety and Virtue, which alone can Secure the Freedom of any People," and a command to "all Judges, Justices, Sheriffs, Grand Jurors, Tythingmen, and all other civil Officers, within this Colony" to "contribute all in their Power, by their Advice, Exertions, and Example towards a general Reformation of Manners," a vigorous enforcement of the laws, and the execution of "the Resolves of the Congress."[23]

In the normal course of things, Chief Justice John Adams would have had the pleasure of delivering these, his own words of counsel, to his fellow citizens from the bench at the opening of every Superior Court session in every county in Massachusetts. But in 1776 this honor went instead to the senior sitting justice, William Cushing, while Adams toiled away in Congress to achieve constitutional reform in several colonies and independence for all of them. He evidently felt that in 1776 the province of Massachusetts was in less immediate need of his guidance—perhaps particularly after penning his proclamation—than Philadelphia's assemblage of disparate and often irresolute delegates from thirteen diverse colonies.[24]

But Adams did not resign the office of chief justice until February 1777. He never explained his long delay, but it probably owed to a strong desire and a firm belief, both of which he expressed privately on several occasions from 1774 to 1779, to retire from national service at the first moment that America had no pressing need for his services, which would, he kept thinking, be soon. In a 15 March 1775 letter to James Warren, written just as he was reaching the final stage of his argument in his *Letters of Novanglus*, he expressed both his wish and his conviction:

> To say the Truth I was much averse to being chosen [to the recently elected Second Provincial Congress], and shall continue so, for I am determined, if Things are Settled, to avoid public Life. I have neither Fortune, Leisure, Health nor Genius for it. Being a Man of desperate Fortune, and a Bankrupt in Business, I cannot help putting my Hand to the Pump, now the Ship is in a storm, and the Hold half full of Water. But as soon as she gets into a Calm and a Place of Safety, I must leave her. At Such a Time as this, there are many dangerous Things to be done, which nobody else will do, and therefore I cannot help attempting them—but in peacefull Times, there are always hands enough ready.

Year after year, John Adams kept expecting the calm that would allow him to retire from the national scene, and then from his diplomatic labors in Europe, to take up local pursuits, whether as chief justice—the first hope that he abandoned—or in the resumption of his legal practice, until 1788, when on his return to America he finally reached that calm place of safety and discovered that he no longer had any wish to terminate his service to his new nation.[25]

Upon his return to Philadelphia on 8 February 1776, Adams had no plans to write another political essay. The Congress, he knew, would keep him fully occupied, and from February to October he was burdened with factional struggles on the floor and constant committee work. But two closely related developments—a need for more competent governments in several colonies to resist the expected assault by British arms; and a growing passion for independence, from Maine to Georgia—soon called on him to take up his pen. He might, with a touch of clairvoyance, have sensed his next intellectual challenge even before he arrived in Philadelphia. As he passed through New York City, he first encountered Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, immediately recognized its power to persuade Americans to embrace independence, and sent at least two copies back to Massachusetts before leaving town.[26]

For over a month after his arrival in Philadelphia, the ever more demanding pace of congressional business commanded Adams's full attention, and his workload continued to grow in the spring. The compounding military difficulties of America's northern army following its bold invasion of Canada in the late fall and winter, and the new challenges facing General Washington's forces as they finally drove the British army and navy from Boston in March and began preparations for the massive invasion expected in New York in the summer, kept the whole Massachusetts delegation busy. But beginning in late March, Adams took what little time he could spare to address America's largest political questions: the most effective form for colonial (and soon to be state) governments, and complete independence from Britain.[27]

Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* was not the primary impetus for Adams's *Thoughts on Government*, but the mounting influence of that phenomenally popular pamphlet did cause Adams deep concern. For nearly two months following its appearance, he not only approved the essay for its forthright advocacy of independence but promoted it among his closest associates in Massachusetts. But by mid-March, he began to have second thoughts. Several friends back home assumed that he was the pamphlet's author, and this especially gave him pause. In a 19 March letter to his wife, Abigail, he explained his reservations:

> You ask, what is thought of Common sense. . . .
>
> [The writer's] Sentiments of the Abilities of America, and of the Difficulty of a Reconciliation with G.B. are generally approved. But his Notions, and

> Plans of Continental Government are not much applauded. Indeed this Writer has a better Hand at pulling down than building.
>
> It has been very generally propagated through the Continent that I wrote this Pamphlet. But altho I could not have written any Thing in so manly and striking a style, I flatter myself I should have made a more respectable Figure as an Architect, if I had undertaken such a Work. This Writer seems to have very inadequate Ideas of what is proper and necessary to be done, in order to form Constitutions for single Colonies, as well as a great Model of Union for the whole.[28]

But when several of John Adams's colleagues in Congress sought his advice on the form of government that would most effectively allow their home colonies to command the allegiance of their inhabitants, perhaps for an extended period of time, without royal authority of any kind, and that would best provide for a vigorous defense against the armed might of Great Britain, he felt he could not refuse "undertaking such a Work." His credentials as a constitutional authority among his colleagues were now secure. His leading role in the debates of October–November 1775 over the petitions of New Hampshire and South Carolina for constitutional guidance was fresh in their minds. But the general political mood of all the rebelling colonies, and the political situation of the three colonies whose congressmen approached Adams, best explains both their request and Adams's response.

By March 1776, the rebellion against British rule was entering a critical phase. Even before the appearance of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* in January, many British North Americans were losing hope of any reconciliation with Great Britain. King George III had refused to receive Congress's July 1775 Olive Branch petition shortly after pronouncing the colonies outside his protection in late August; the news reached America early in November. Through the fall and winter, and into the spring, alarming rumors crossed the Atlantic—that the king would hire Russian mercenaries to fight in America (he did not, but only because Catherine the Great would not rent them out), and next that he would hire German mercenaries (which he did, although confirmation of these contracts did not reach America until late April and early May). As *Common Sense* became an unprecedented sensation from New Hampshire to Georgia in February and March, hundreds of local leaders, and many thousands of their constituents, began to consider, then endorse, and finally demand independence from Britain. Adams, who had begun to doubt the wisdom of remaining in the British Empire no later than the previous June, was greatly encouraged and wanted to do everything in his power to support the accelerating force for separation.[29]

Five of the thirteen rebelling colonies felt little need to reform their constitutions in the spring of 1776. Connecticut and Rhode Island, largely autonomous for more than a century, simply put their elected magistrates to work

supporting the war effort. Massachusetts, in an arrangement that few regarded as perfect, but most accepted as tolerable, had secured Congress's blessing in June 1775 to create an autonomous government under its 1691 charter, and would retain that government until a more thorough reformation in 1779–80. New Hampshire and South Carolina had acted quickly on Congress's approval of their petitions to reform their governments in the fall of 1775 and would defer any further changes in their constitutions until after Independence. At the other end of the scale, New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and Georgia were still too divided between Patriots and Tories, zealots, neutrals and pacifists, to consider either independence or constitutional reform until the summer. Three colonies, however, were ready and eager to begin the process of reform that spring: North Carolina, Virginia, and New Jersey.[30]

Within a few days of Adams's private critique of *Common Sense* on 19 March, Congressman William Hooper and then his colleague John Penn, both of North Carolina, asked him for his advice on the best form of government, in preparation for their departure on 27 March for their home colony, to which they had been called to attend a provincial convention in April. Adams wrote out a letter, based on a common plan, for each delegate, and made the second, for Penn, somewhat longer and more polished than the first. Congressman George Wythe from Virginia saw one or both letters and immediately asked Adams for a similar letter that he might use in Virginia's upcoming constitutional convention in May. Adams complied at even greater length. Then Richard Henry Lee of Virginia asked for a separate letter, but Adams, weary after composing three similar but distinct and steadily expanding letters on the same plan of government, suggested that Lee borrow and copy Wythe's letter. Lee seized the initiative and took Wythe's letter to the congressional printer John Dunlop, who began to set it in type. Before it appeared, as *Thoughts on Government*, Congressman Jonathan Dickinson Sergeant of New Jersey asked Adams for yet another letter, in anticipation of his colony's constitutional convention in June. It was now mid-April, but once more Adams agreed, and prepared a letter that was longer than any of its predecessors, including the text of *Thoughts on Government*. This last effort has unfortunately not survived.[31]

Because Adams's basic plan of government is quite similar in the three surviving texts of March–April 1776, and because all three were evidently written within a period of no more than three weeks, the following discussion will center on the third text, *Thoughts on Government*. But the composition of the texts as a whole does merit a brief comment. Despite the limited time for the composition of the first two letters—just over one week, ending on 27 March—as well as for the third for George Wythe, which followed soon thereafter, and the implication of Adams's remark in his letter to Abigail that he had not been engaged "as an Architect" in designing any government before 19 March, the plans that he produced differ in too many details for him to have simply copied them

from any prior finished text. Yet some details are identical in all three letters, so that he must either have had on hand well-organized material for a plan of government or developed a written plan quickly, before composing his first letter, to Congressman Hooper. A look back at Adams's constitutional activity in the fall of 1775 suggests that he may in fact have possessed extensive notes on constructing constitutions, which he could have produced during the debates in Congress over New Hampshire's petition for political guidance in October, as well as a rough draft of his 15 November 1775 letter to Richard Henry Lee.[32]

A comparison of Adams's 1775 letter to Lee and the constitutional structure in *Thoughts on Government* shows a close congruence, centering on the following features: a bicameral legislature, with a popularly elected house that in turn would elect a council; the election of a governor, and other executive officers, by a joint ballot of the house and council; a legislative function for the full council and advisory executive functions for smaller numbers of councilors; a legislative role for the governor, through his possession of an absolute veto over bills passed by the house and the council; and an independent judiciary, nominated by the governor, and approved by the council. A comparison of this structure with other constitutions that Adams either knew intimately or, in 1779, would draft himself yields three more points of congruence. First, the plan closely resembles the Massachusetts Charter of 1691, the only colonial constitution that Adams knew well. Second, it also resembles the general idea of government that Adams espoused on the floor of Congress in the fall of 1775, shortly before writing out his brief plan for Lee. Finally, in the relationship between the branches of government that it created, although not in the manner of their creation, the plan in *Thoughts on Government* is almost identical to John Adams's 1779 draft for what became the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780.[33]

If the mechanics of *Thoughts on Government* show remarkable continuity both with Adams's constitutional experience, dating back to his youth, and with his greatest constitutional creation, some three years after Independence, the pamphlet also shows signs of dynamic development. In the three weeks from the Hooper letter, through the Penn letter, to the Wythe letter, which was printed as *Thoughts*, the text expanded and took on a greater intellectual and literary sophistication. Most of the substantive changes were simple additions, notably the provisions for rotation in office and impeachment for misbehaving judges, but one alteration was more significant. In his letters to Hooper and Penn, as in the earlier letter to Lee, Adams made no clear provision for a small advisory governor's council that would be distinct from the larger legislative council. But in *Thoughts* he introduced the term "Privy Council" to designate a small quorum of councilors, about one-third of the larger body, for this purpose. In 1779 he would develop an elaborate method for choosing both a legislative senate and a separate governor's council in Massachusetts. By that date, Adams had come to place great importance on the distinction between these two bodies,

and in 1787 his commitment to that distinction would prompt his first criticism of the federal Constitution.[34]

Thoughts on Government closely resembled Adams's 1775 letter to Richard Henry Lee in another respect as well. In both, and in his letters to Hooper and Penn, he conceded the need for flexibility in framing governments for the several colonies so that every constitutional provision adopted by each colony would be compatible with the distinct political history, and the expectations of the people, of that colony. Because the plan he proposed in *Thoughts on Government* was designed for quick approval under emergency conditions, he also thought that the people in several colonies might introduce popular elections for their council and governor once the crisis—the war with Britain—had passed.[35]

But from the outset, Adams declared in favor of a new form and style of government for all his countrymen, both in Massachusetts and in every province that rebelled from British authority. America's immediate need, of course, was for new governments that would, in the words he would shortly employ in Congress's Preamble of 15 May to its Resolve of 10 May, "totally suppress every kind of authority under the Crown of Great Britain."[36] Such governments would effectively support the resistance to British authority and British arms everywhere in America, and would prepare every colony for independence. But the governments that John Adams wished to see take shape would not simply be independent governments; they would be republican governments. Adams made this clear in his first constitutional text of 1776, his letter to William Hooper, in which, for the first time in his writings, he gave Massachusetts a republican history to explain the republican reality that had been emerging in his province over the past decade:

> The Spirit of the People, among whom I had my Birth and Education, which you know very well, was always republican, although they never enjoyed a Constitution of Government conformable to that Spirit, as the whole of the Executive, with an enormous Prerogative, as well as two Branches of their Legislative, and the whole of their judicial Powers, were always in the Hands of the Crown. It was wholly owing to the Constitution of their Towns, which were Small Districts incorporated by an early Law, and vested with Powers to assemble frequently, deliberate, debate and act, upon many Affairs, together with the Establishment of Grammar Schools in every one of those Towns, that Such a Spirit was preserved, at all among the People.[37]

In *Thoughts on Government*, Adams omitted any characterization of his own province and opened his brief for republicanism with a much broader appeal to history. First, he dramatized the importance of having a sound constitution by quoting and promptly dismissing Alexander Pope's familiar couplet: "For forms of government let fools contest, That which is best administered is best." "Nothing," Adams declared, "can be more fallacious than this: But poets read history

to collect flowers, not fruits—they attend to fanciful images, not the effects of social institutions. Nothing is more certain from the history of nations, and the nature of man, than that some forms of government are better fitted for being well administered than others."[38]

Adams proceeded to inquire what the proper end of government was and found his first answer in "the happiness of society." Religion and philosophy alike taught that "the form of government, which communicates ease, comfort, security, or in one word happiness to the greatest number of persons, and in the greatest degree, is the best." But Adams was not espousing some secular, proto-utilitarian doctrine. "All sober enquiries after truth, ancient and modern, Pagan and Christian," including those of "Confucius, Zoroaster, Socrates, and Mahomet, not to mention authorities really sacred," he argued, "had declared the happiness of man, as well as his dignity consists in virtue." "The foundation of every government," he continued, "is some principle or passion in the minds of the people. The noblest principles and most generous affections in our nature then, have the fairest chance to support the noblest and most generous models of government."[39]

Where could one find "the noblest and most generous models of government"? Adams discovered them in the time and place that lay at the heart of Whig America's historical memory—a memory that their current British masters, Americans believed, had largely forgotten—the English nation that had challenged and eventually thrown off the despotism of the Stuarts:

> A man must be indifferent to the sneers of modern Englishmen to mention in their company the names of Sidney, Harrington, Locke, Milton, Nedham, Neville, Burnet, and Hoadley. No small fortitude is necessary to confess that one has read them. The wretched condition of this country, however, for ten or fifteen years past, has frequently reminded me of their principles and reasonings. They will convince any candid mind, that there is no good government but what is Republican. That the only valuable part of the British constitution is so; because the very definition of a Republic, is "an Empire of Laws, and not of men."[40]

Because there was "an inexhaustible variety" of republics arising out of the "innumerable variations" in "the possible combinations of the powers of society," one must carefully design a republic that would make laws wisely and execute them impartially for a particular society. This brought Adams to his recommendations for American republics. Because "in a large society, inhabiting an extensive country, it is impossible that the whole should assemble, to make laws," his countrymen would have to select representatives, which they could do either by agreeing "upon the number and qualifications of persons, who shall have the benefit of choosing" (an individually defined electorate) or by annexing this privilege "to the inhabitants of a certain extent of ground" (a regionally

defined electorate). Both principles would come into play in America's long conversation about constitutions over the next several years.[41]

The "principal difficulty," Adams declared, was "in constituting this Representative Assembly." This body held the primary position in the structure of government for most Americans of the Revolutionary era who thought deeply about constitutions, both in the seminal essays and pamphlets that they produced, including *Thoughts on Government*, and in the many constitutions they drafted, including the federal Constitution of 1787. The Assembly, or House of Representatives, was the base institution of republican government, and must be carefully structured to function properly in that government. For John Adams in 1776, the Assembly "should be in miniature, an exact portrait of the people at large. It should think, feel, reason, and act like them. That it may be the interest of this Assembly to do strict justice at all times, it should be an equal representation, or in other words equal interest among the people should have equal interest in it. Great care should be taken to effect this, and to prevent unfair, partial, and corrupt elections." The general principle seemed unexceptional, but fundamental disagreements over the proper determination of the "equal interest among the people" that would have "equal interest in [the Assembly]" would begin in 1776 and, in different guises, would inform the history of the American republic into the present era.[42]

The central portion of *Thoughts on Government* presented a general structure of all the institutions of government, with the essential checks and balances between them, that Adams regarded as fundamental to the survival of a sound republic. His first task of political persuasion was to continue the argument he had begun in Congress in October 1775, to make the case for a bicameral legislature and for separate executive and judicial branches. Asking whether "all the powers of government, legislative, executive, and judicial, shall be left in [one assembly]," he predicted that a people who chose this course "cannot long be free, or ever happy." He itemized a half dozen reasons against concentrating all power in one legislative chamber, of which three involved the principle of checks and balances, and two the issue of competence. A single assembly, he argued, was "liable to all the vices, follies, and frailties of an individual"; was "apt to be avaricious," levying taxes on its constituents while exempting its own members; and would "grow ambitious, and after a time will not hesitate to vote itself perpetual" (here he mentioned the closed assemblies in the contemporary Dutch republic). Moreover, an assembly "is unfit to exercise the executive power, for want of two essential properties, secrecy and dispatch"; and "is still less qualified for judicial power; because it is too numerous, too slow, and too little skilled in the laws."[43]

For all these reasons, Adams predicted disaster for unicameral legislatures, even if the authors of new American constitutions delegated the executive power to another body, or to a single individual, because

> these two powers will oppose and enervate upon each other, until the contest shall end in war, and the whole power, legislative and executive, be usurped by the strongest.
>
> The judicial power, in such case, could not mediate, or hold the balance between the two contending powers, because the legislative would undermine it. And this shews the necessity too, of giving the executive power a negative upon the legislative, otherwise this will continually be encroaching upon that.
>
> To avoid these dangers let a [distinct] Assembly be constituted, as a mediator between the two extreme branches of the legislature, that which represents the people and that which is vested with executive power.[44]

Adams's proposed structure for a sound republican government followed this argument. The representative assembly would choose the second legislative chamber "from among themselves or their constituents, or both," to consist of any number, "say twenty or thirty." This body "should have a free and independent exercise of its judgment, and consequently a negative voice in the legislature." These two bodies would then "unite, and by joint ballot choose a Governor, who, after being stripped of most of those badges of domination called prerogatives, should have a free and independent exercise of his judgment, and be made also an integral part of the legislature." At this point, Adams conceded that some states might prefer to make its executive "only President of the Council, as in Connecticut." But if they did so, this executive should still have "a negative upon the legislative" and be elected annually. The legislature would then choose the state's other major executive officeholders—lieutenant governor, secretary, treasurer, commissary, and attorney general—by joint ballot. Adams closed this section by urging the annual election of every representative, councilor, and executive officer, so that "these great men" every year:

> Like bubbles on the sea of matter borne,
> They rise, they break, and to that sea return.

"This," Adams concluded, "will teach them the great political virtues of humility, patience, and moderation, without which every man in power becomes a ravenous beast of prey."[45]

Thoughts then turned to several major questions of function. Adams first recommended the principle of rotation in office for all legislators and executives, who could "be allowed to serve for three years, and then excluded three years, or for any longer or shorter term." (This was one idea that Adams would not pursue in drafting the Massachusetts Constitution in 1779, and which he would emphatically reject by 1787.) He then suggested that "any seven or nine of the legislative Council may be made a Quorum, for doing business as a Privy Council, to advise the Governor in the exercise of the executive branch of power, and in all acts of state." The governor "should have the command of the militia" and

should appoint all judges, justices and other officers with the advice and consent of the council, "unless you choose to have a government more popular," when appointment by joint ballot of the legislative houses would be appropriate. Local officers, however, the sheriffs, registers of deeds, and county clerks, "should be chosen by the freeholders of counties."[46]

John Adams had been deeply concerned about the independence of the judiciary for several years, and in *Thoughts* he forcefully made the case for their independence:

> The dignity and stability of government in all its branches, the morals of the people and every blessing of society, depends so much upon an upright and skillful administration of justice, that the judicial power ought to be distinct from both the legislative and the executive, and independent upon both, that so it may be a check upon both, as both should be checks upon that. . . . The [judges] minds should not be distracted by jarring interests; they should not be dependent upon any man or body of men. To these ends they should hold estates for life in their offices, or in other words their commissions should be during good behaviour, and their salaries ascertained and established by law.[47]

Brief sections on impeachment, a militia law, and sumptuary laws, and on new commissions, writs, and indictments that should run in the name of the colony, rather than the British Crown, rounded out Adams's plan for new governments. He then turned to another favorite theme that he had first addressed more than a decade earlier. "Laws for the liberal education of youth, especially of the lower classes of people, are so extremely wise and useful, that to a humane and generous mind, no expense for this purpose would be thought extravagant."[48]

John Adams could have concluded his argument with a general statement that such new governments would ensure order in the rebelling colonies and arm them in their arduous struggle with Great Britain. But he looked beyond this immediate goal, to summon up a vision of America's republican future:

> A Constitution, founded on these principles, introduces knowledge among the People, and inspires them with a conscious dignity, becoming Freemen. A general emulation takes place, which causes good humour, sociability, good manners, and good morals to be general. That elevation of sentiment, inspired by such a government, makes the common people brave and enterprizing. That ambition which is inspired by it makes them sober, industrious and frugal. You will find among them some elegance, perhaps, but more solidity; a little pleasure, but a great deal of business—some politeness, but more civility. If you compare such a country with the regions of domination, whether Monarchial or Aristocratical, you will fancy yourself in Arcadia or Elisium.[49]

Adams finally addressed the question of intercolonial union. Looking clearly toward independence, to which he carefully made no direct reference, he thought

that "if a Continental Constitution should be formed, it should be a Congress, containing a fair and adequate Representation of the Colonies, and its authority should sacredly be confined to these cases, viz. war, trade, disputes between Colony and Colony, the Post-Office, and the unappropriated lands of the Crown, as they used to be called." He concluded his formal argument with a confident, almost defiant declaration: "These Colonies, under such forms of government, and in such a union, would be unconquerable by all the Monarchies of Europe."[50]

But *Thoughts on Government* began its life as a letter (to Virginia's George Wythe), and Adams gave it a personal ending, which in printed form addressed not only its recipient but all aspiring American Patriots who shared its author's sense of history:

> You and I, my dear Friend, have been sent into life, at a time when the greatest law-givers of antiquity would have wished to have lived. How few of the human race have ever enjoyed an opportunity of making an election of government more than of air, soil, or climate, for themselves or their children. When! Before the present epocha, had three millions of people full power and a fair opportunity to form and establish the wisest and happiest government that human wisdom can contrive? I hope you will avail yourself and your country of that extensive learning and indefatigable industry which you possess, to assist her in the formations of the happiest governments, and the best character of a great People.

He concluded on a more personal note:

> For myself, I must beg you to keep my name out of sight, for this feeble attempt, if it should be known to be mine, would oblige me to apply to myself those lines of the immortal John Milton, in one of his sonnets,
>
> I did but teach the age to quit their cloggs
> By the plain rules of ancient Liberty,
> When lo! A barbarous noise surrounded me,
> Of owls and cuckoos, asses, apes and dogs.[51]

Thoughts on Government was advertised for sale in Philadelphia on 22 April 1776, but Adams had received copies from the printer by 20 April, when he sent one to James Warren. Although the pamphlet was written expressly for members of Congress and other political leaders who were seeking advice on how to establish independent governments for their colonies, its impact on state constitution making in 1776 cannot be determined with any certainty. Five states that framed new constitutions between May and December of that year—Virginia, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and North Carolina, in the order of completion of their documents—did establish governments of the kind that Adams

had recommended. Only Pennsylvania, which based its new constitution on a unicameral legislature, departed widely from Adams's plan.[52]

Determining the precise role that *Thoughts on Government* played in this complex process is problematical. Its recommendations were probably most influential in Virginia, whose congressional delegation contained three of Adams's friends, George Wythe, Thomas Jefferson, and Richard Henry Lee, who were especially prominent in that colony's political life. The members of Virginia's provincial convention, who gathered in Williamsburg in May, had for their guidance both *Thoughts on Government* and a current handbill, printed in Williamsburg shortly before the convention opened, that contained the substance of Adams's 15 November 1775 letter to Lee. His personal connections to state convention members were weaker in New Jersey (meeting in June–July) and in Maryland (meeting in November). The close connections he had to certain leaders in the Philadelphia area, if they had any impact, brought mixed results: a constitution of the kind he liked in Delaware, and one he deplored in Pennsylvania, both completed in September. And the spring convention in North Carolina, to which his congressional colleagues William Hooper and John Penn carried Adams's March letters that preceded and closely resembled the text of *Thoughts*, voted in favor of independence but deferred drafting a new constitution until the fall, when they did create a structure of government that was similar to the plan in *Thoughts*.[53]

Adams himself later believed that *Thoughts on Government* and his whole approach to constructing constitutions had both an immediate impact on these early state constitutions and an even greater influence on American constitutional thought and practice in the years after 1776, notably on the constitution of New York (1777), his own Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, and the federal Constitution of 1787. He would even claim that the ideas expressed by "Publius" (Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison) in the *Federalist Papers* (1787–88) owed much to his constitutional beliefs expressed more than a decade earlier.[54]

Shortly after *Thoughts on Government* appeared, however, he told James Warren that the structure of government he had proposed, in which a popularly elected assembly would elect a council, and both would jointly chose a governor, was shaped by what he thought would be acceptable to the southern colonies. Both in *Thoughts*, indirectly, and in his contemporary correspondence, more candidly, he expressed his preference for the popular election of both a province's council and governor, which he believed all of New England would favor. He expressed a particular admiration for the government of Connecticut, which carried its seventeenth-century constitution virtually intact out of the British Empire and made it the foundation of one of the most democratic republics in America—and in the world.[55]

But if the impact of *Thoughts on Government* on America's constitutional development cannot be measured with assurance, the pamphlet's role in the development of John Adams's constitutional thought is both clear and certain. This brief tract distills the essence of Adams's most important political and constitutional ideas that he first expressed in his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* (1765), his "Clarendon" letters (1766), his oration on government at Braintree (1772), his essays "On the Independence of the Judges" (1773), and his *Letters of Novanglus* (1775). The inspired fourth essay of his *Dissertation* was the source of *Thought*'s appeal for local laws that would provide for "the liberal education of youth, especially of the lower class of people," a support that, he had recently declared in his March letter to William Hooper, had been largely responsible for the survival of republican principles in the royal province of Massachusetts. Adams's third "Clarendon" letter, the most important of that series, supplied his basic argument for checks and balances in a free government. Adams's oration at Braintree was the source for *Thought*'s admission that there were many varieties of republics, from which Americans must choose carefully to secure a government that would work effectively for the body of the common people. From his essays "On the Independence of the Judges," Adams drew his passionate defense of an independent judiciary (which sadly, of all John Adams's teachings of 1776, has been the most ignored by the great majority of American states to the present day). And from the English Commonwealth and republican authors whose writings he had espoused in the crucial sixth and seventh letters of *Novanglus*, Adams drew both *Thoughts*'s historical defense of republicanism and a republic's essential definition: "an Empire of Laws, and not of men."[56]

Of all Adams's major political writings of the previous decade, only his contributions to the Massachusetts Assembly's two Replies to Governor Hutchinson in 1773 did not contribute substantially to *Thoughts on Government*. The reason for this is obvious: the principal objective of those replies was to claim and defend a fundamental autonomy for America's colonies within the British Empire. In April 1776, John Adams felt no need to defend that autonomy; every American who accepted the leadership of Congress and the need to resist British arms had embraced it in the months after Lexington and Concord, and most were now ready to elevate autonomy to full independence.[57]

3. The Struggle for Independence

Within weeks of completing *Thoughts on Government*, John Adams began investing every moment he could spare from his heavy congressional duties to the cause of independence. His appeal for constitutional reform in *Thoughts*, directed both to the broader public and to political leaders in receptive colonies, had a logical connection to that campaign because there was an almost perfect

correlation between colonies that resisted constitutional reform in the spring of 1776 and those whose congressional delegations resisted independence until the first days of July. But in early May, Adams turned his efforts to achieve independence to the small stage that he had gradually come to master, the Continental Congress. There he allied with a handful of like-minded colleagues, most notably his cousin, Samuel Adams, Thomas McKean of Delaware, and Richard Henry Lee of Virginia.[58]

To attempt an accurate appraisal of John Adams's personal efforts to achieve independence, one must first dispel a myth about the man and many of his Revolutionary colleagues, including his zealous cousin. Both British and American Tories charged that America's most "radical" Patriot leaders, in particular Samuel Adams, but also John, had secretly aspired to full independence from Great Britain long before Lexington and Concord, perhaps even as early as the Stamp Act crisis. Recent studies of the Revolution have found no evidence for this charge, and Pauline Maier has made a strong case against it for Samuel Adams in an argument that could apply to many Patriot leaders. As for John Adams, there is not a shred of evidence that he supported full independence—as opposed to the substantial colonial autonomy within the broader cultural and commercial framework of the British Empire that he defended so ably in his *Letters of Novanglus*—at any point before 19 April 1775.[59]

For several weeks following Lexington and Concord, Adams gave no hint of his thoughts about independence, but on 10 June 1775 he wrote to a Massachusetts friend that he did not believe America would be able to stay in the British Empire on honorable terms. He never repudiated this view, but until 1776 he did not think Americans were close to breaking with Britain. Events of the winter and early spring of that year, and the public's enthusiastic reception of *Common Sense*, changed his mind. By April 1776, independence appeared not only desirable to Adams but possible. By May, it was beginning to appear unavoidable to all who wished to escape British oppression. Everything John Adams did in early 1776, from writing *Thoughts on Government* to delivering his final floor speech on the issue on 1 July, was directed to securing the full independence of a free people.[60]

Of the several colonies that strongly resisted independence in the spring of 1776, the two most important, both for their strategic geographic locations and their resources, were New York and Pennsylvania. The latter colony offered a fertile field of opportunity for congressmen from any colony who supported independence. Residing in Pennsylvania's capital, they could meet easily, both openly and secretly, with Philadelphia's radical leaders, take the political temperature of both the city and the provincial assembly, and frame congressional measures that would strengthen zealous local Patriots. Just twice in his long career did John Adams commit himself to influencing popular opinion and encouraging popular leaders in a large community outside his native province to

achieve a political end. The second occasion was his campaign, during his diplomatic residence in Holland, to secure Dutch recognition of American independence (1780–82); the first was his collaboration with local leaders to bring Philadelphia and the province of Pennsylvania into the independence column. Both depended on effective published propaganda, accompanied and followed by frequent strategy meetings with local allies.[61]

As he began his Pennsylvania campaign, Adams had powerful allies but also powerful opponents, both in Congress and outside the chamber. In Congress he could rely on close support and counsel from Samuel Adams and from Thomas McKean, who sat for Delaware but was just as strongly connected with Pennsylvania. His principal congressional opponent was his old nemesis, John Dickinson, a prominent voice of moderation in Congress in 1775 and the leader of Pennsylvanians who opposed independence in 1776. In Philadelphia, both the radical civilian committees and the leadership of the militia were strongly for independence, but many merchants and other affluent residents were reluctant to take the final step. The Pennsylvania Assembly was still dominated by Quakers, lapsed Quakers of pacifist inclinations, and a handful of supporters of the proprietary Penn family; all feared a complete break with Britain.[62]

In common with several other popularly elected legislative chambers in eighteenth-century British North America, the Pennsylvania Assembly clung tenaciously to an apportionment of seats that favored the colony's older seaboard counties and discriminated against the substantial populations of its only large city and its rapidly developing backcountry. In early April, just as Adams was completing *Thoughts on Government*, the legislators, under intense popular pressure to allow their delegates in Congress to support independence, sought to diffuse the issue by passing a bill to enlarge their house, with additional seats for the City of Philadelphia and the interior counties. Adams, who had evidently established a strong connection with several of Philadelphia's radicals before the vote, hoped the election of 1 May 1776 would tip the balance. But in a close contest, those opposing independence won just enough new seats in Philadelphia and two interior counties to defer facing the issue immediately.[63]

In response to this setback, and to a continued resistance to considering independence in several other colonies, Congress, on 10 May 1776, passed a brief resolve: "That it be recommended to the respective Assemblies and Conventions of the United Colonies, where no Government sufficient to the exigencies of their affairs has been hitherto established, to adopt such Government as shall in the opinion of the Representatives of the People best conduce to the happiness and safety of their Constituents in particular, and America in general." This language hardly resolved the issue. It seemed to do little more than restate the general resolutions directed to New Hampshire and South Carolina the previous fall, which had recommended that they "establish such a form of Government, as in their Judgment will best produce the happiness of the People,

and most effectually secure Peace and good Order in the Province." Congressman John Dickinson promptly observed that because Pennsylvanians enjoyed a freely elected assembly and a proprietary governor who had not obstructed their legislators' actions, their government was fully "sufficient to the exigencies of their affairs."[64]

But Congress had another card up its sleeve. Immediately after approving the Resolve, it appointed a small but zealous committee—Edward Rutledge, Richard Henry Lee, and John Adams—to prepare a Preamble to explain the Resolve. Adams drafted this Preamble, and Congress, after a brief but sharp debate, passed it on 15 May. This was John Adams's last major political text before Independence:

> Whereas his Britannic Majesty, in conjunction with the Lords and Commons of Great-Britain, has, by a late Act of Parliament, excluded the inhabitants of these United Colonies from the protection of his crown: And whereas no answer whatever to the humble petitions of the Colonies for redress of grievances, and reconciliation with Great-Britain has been or is likely to be given; but the whole force of that kingdom, aided by foreign mercenaries, is to be exerted for the destruction of the good people of these Colonies; And whereas it appears absolutely irreconcileable to reason and good conscience, for the people of these Colonies now to take the oaths and affirmations necessary for the support of any government under the Crown of Great-Britain; and it is necessary that the exercise of every kind of authority under the said Crown should be totally suppressed, and all the powers of government exerted under the authority of the people of the Colonies for the preservation of internal peace, virtue, and good order, as well as for the defense of their lives, liberties and properties, against the hostile invasions and cruel depredations of their enemies: Therefore, RESOLVED, [with the Resolution of 10 May following].[65]

Adams was euphoric at Congress's approval of the Preamble, which was immediately published, with the Resolve, in a broadside. In a letter written to his Massachusetts friend and ally, James Warren, on the day of the Preamble's passage, he characterized it as "the most important Resolution, that ever was taken in America." The core of the document was a declaration that attacked every remaining moderate defender of the colonial order, from New York to Georgia: "[I]t is necessary that the exercise of every kind of authority under the said Crown should be totally suppressed, and all the powers of government [be] exerted under the authority of the people of the Colonies." On 20 May, he sent Warren an update of the progress toward independence. Counting Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia in the independence column, along with the four New England colonies, he was confident that with Congress's support the cause would soon triumph in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. Only Maryland remained in some doubt.[66]

The Preamble of 15 May finally began to undermine the opposition of the middle colonies to the break with Britain. Pennsylvania's delegation sought clarification of the meaning of the text from Congress, but in Philadelphia the opponents of independence rapidly lost political support. King George III's conclusion of treaties to hire German mercenaries, still just a rumor in the city at the 1 May election, was confirmed within a week. Five days after the passage and immediate publication of the Preamble and Resolve, a mass meeting in Philadelphia condemned the Assembly, and when the newly expanded legislature met in late May, it had difficulty making quorums. After rescinding its earlier instruction to its congressional delegation not to support independence, without replacing it with any new instruction, the session quickly collapsed, and Pennsylvania's political revolution began.[67]

Both Delaware, with a separate legislature but the same accommodating proprietary governor as Pennsylvania, and Maryland, which had quietly tolerated another accommodating proprietary governor, soon felt similar popular pressures, and were no more able to resist the tide for independence. Under pressure from Congress, Maryland finally expelled Governor Robert Eden, the last governor to leave his rebelling colony, on 26 June 1776. Without strong support from Pennsylvania and Maryland, congressmen from New York, with the largest Tory population of any colony, could not hold out for long.[68]

The final battle for independence opened in Congress on 7 June, when Virginia's Richard Henry Lee moved: "That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved." Congress deferred a vote on Lee's resolve for over three weeks as it sought to secure support from the middle colonies, but it promptly created a committee to prepare a Declaration of Independence. Adams was named to the committee, but he played only a minor role in shaping Thomas Jefferson's draft of the text. It was in the final week of debate over the essential issue, culminating in his summary oration of 1 July on the floor of Congress, that Adams earned the tribute first accorded to him in August, "the Atlas of Independence."[69]

A review of the closely related themes of independence from Britain and constitutional reform in the colonies, from October 1775 to July 1776, suggests the wisdom behind the witty observation that the American Revolution was the result of a temporary alliance between the Adams and Lee families. In the fall of 1775, John Adams received crucial support from Richard Henry Lee in his argument that Congress must encourage New Hampshire and South Carolina to reform their governments to make them more autonomous. He then summarized his constitutional ideas in a letter to Lee, who would have it published as a handbill in Williamsburg the following May, just as Virginians gathered to frame their first state constitution. In March and April 1776, Adams advised

congressmen from North Carolina, Virginia, and New Jersey on reforming their colonies' constitutions, now with the direct intention of preparing them for independence.[70]

At this point, Lee stepped in to arrange the publication of Adams's advice as *Thoughts on Government*. Soon thereafter, John Adams, with the assistance of his congressional committee colleagues Edward Rutledge and Lee, wrote the Preamble to Congress's Resolve of 10 May, to encourage each colony to suppress "every kind of authority under the [British] Crown," and, in company with his cousin, Samuel Adams, he met with Pennsylvania's supporters of independence as they prepared to overthrow their conservative Assembly. In June, Lee stepped forward again to move that Congress declare independence and seek foreign alliances. The final summation for independence, delivered to his peers in Congress in reply to John Dickinson's final argument against it, fell to barrister John Adams on 1 July. The jury—Congress—issued its verdict for independence on the following day, a date that Adams mistakenly, but understandably, believed would be celebrated in America forever.[71]

4. Adams at the Center

In the fifteen months between the outbreak of armed rebellion in Massachusetts and Independence, John Adams moved decisively to the center of American political life and constitutional thought. To occupy such a position was a major departure from the earlier course of Adams's life. From the beginning of his public career, as a newspaper essayist in 1763, he had mostly chosen to engage the issues of the day from the sidelines by writing anonymous political pieces for the local press, and by associating with his province's growing Patriot movement primarily as a local committeeman and as occasional counsel to the Massachusetts assembly in its constitutional battles with Governor Thomas Hutchinson. Only once, in 1770–71, had he served in the legislature, and he never signed his published work with his own name until his exploration of judicial independence in 1773 (and never again until 1787). His constitutional arguments were equally independent. He made almost no references to other American writers but charted his own path under the guidance of English and continental authors, some of whom were quite out of fashion west of the Atlantic. In June 1774, when he accepted an appointment to the First Continental Congress, he evidently did so only because he thought his country was in the utmost peril.[72]

In the course of the decade following the Stamp Act crisis, however, this temperamentally independent—at times almost counterdependent—individual found himself drawn to his nation's rapidly developing political center by the dynamic force of the imperial crisis. All Americans who rejected Britain's claims to tax them and to intervene in their internal affairs without their consent needed a legal and political defense of that position, and every colonial writer

who drafted such a defense appealed to the same broad sources: the history of English colonization in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century North America, the political history of the British Isles in this same period, and the political thought of the English (and occasionally Scottish) Enlightenment. John Adams was hardly the first British American to explore this territory. In the 1760s, James Otis in Massachusetts and Richard Bland in Virginia were well ahead of him, and Pennsylvania's James Wilson would also have been, had he published his first political essay promptly. But Adams was the most persistent and enterprising American political writer before Thomas Paine. In every calendar year from 1772 through 1776, he advanced his argument for colonial autonomy in bold steps and major leaps, moving the foundation of America's corporate existence from realm to dominion (1773), then to the nature of imperial citizenship (1774–75), and finally to the classical republic (1775–76).

What the logic of rebellion in British North America did for Adams the thinker and writer, the Continental Congress did for Adams the leader. When he entered Congress in September 1774, he stood no higher in name recognition or reputation than third place in his province's four-man delegation. His reputation for sound reasoning grew quickly in the brief First Continental Congress, but upon his return to Philadelphia in May 1775, he deferred to the wisdom of his colleagues, and to that of political leaders back in Massachusetts, when his native province sought constitutional guidance from the Second Continental Congress. Not until October 1775 did Adams feel ready to claim the role of Congress's principal constitutional authority, and several of his colleagues contested that role when they felt that he was rushing them toward a republican form of government. As late as November 1775, Adams's standing as a constitutional thinker was still a matter of some debate within the chamber.[73]

By March 1776, however, the great majority of Congress was ready to acknowledge Adams's leadership in resolving America's constitutional dilemma. Any defense of coequal American dominions within the British Empire, or of equal citizenship under a common imperial sovereign, two approaches to the imperial problem that Adams himself had developed in 1773 and 1775, respectively, now appeared hopelessly inadequate. In the spring and early summer of 1776, first in *Thoughts on Government* in April, then in Congress's 15 May Preamble to its 10 May Resolve, urging the colonies to create new governments free of "every kind of authority under the [British] Crown," and finally in full independence from Britain, Adams stated his final resolution of the imperial problem: the transformation of the rebelling American colonies into durable sovereign republics constructed on a common classical model that carefully balanced contending political forces.

Yet John Adams's actual decision to move to the center of political life, first in Massachusetts and then among all the colonies protesting Britain's imperial policies, was reached quite gradually from 1765 to 1774. During several long

periods in this decade, each extending over several months, he left no trace in his public or private writings of his pondering such action. But at several points he openly confessed to his diary the turmoil of his political emotions. In the first such episode, in 1768, he admitted to a general anxiety about the place of both his profession and his growing political interests in his life as a moral man. In the second episode, marked by the first "vacation" he ever took, in the spring of 1771, he moved not toward but away from public life, in which he had become so heavily involved the previous year. But even as he drew back, he expressed misgivings about doing so, and even imagined that he had more audaciously opposed Massachusetts's royal governor, Thomas Hutchinson, than his most outspoken political colleagues in Boston. In the third episode, in the late fall and winter of 1772–73, he moved back toward the center, and in 1773 he would play a crucial role, from outside the legislative chamber, in the provincial assembly's sharpest confrontation with Governor Hutchinson. In his final struggle to commit to the resistance movement, extending from the fall of 1773 into the summer of 1774, Adams began, in his ardent admiration for the Boston Tea Party, with the conviction that America must defend its rights and concluded with the resolve to place his own career, and his life, on the line, by accepting his appointment to the First Continental Congress. Thereafter, until his forced retirement from the presidency in 1801, John Adams was as close to the center of American public life as his colleagues, and the public, would allow him to be.

In this decade of increasing public visibility and commitment, John Adams played two seemingly incompatible roles: intellectual pioneer and political centrist. In the first role, primarily in his writings from 1773 to early 1776, Adams led virtually all American writers in his exploration of the logic and law of national realms versus colonial dominions, of imperial citizenship, and above all, of early modern Europe's rediscovery of classical republicanism. Yet Adams the intellectual pioneer seemed squarely in America's mainstream, never more so than in his *Thoughts on Government*, which from the day of its publication became the most succinct and powerful expression of America's constitutional orthodoxy on the eve of Independence. Adams's role in Congress in 1776, as the "Atlas of Independence" during the final floor debate over leaving the British Empire, as the draftsman of America's Plan of Treaties, and as president of Congress's Board of War, was more than central; it was preeminent.

But John Adams's service in Congress in 1776 would mark both the climax and the conclusion of his intellectual domination of his new nation's political center. Over the next decade, at first quite gradually and almost imperceptibly, then more precipitously, he moved off to occupy his own unique position in American political thought. As early as 1776, and certainly by 1779, as Adams drafted the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, a perceptive observer might have caught two distinctive features of his thought that foreshadowed where he was going. First, from the late 1750s John Adams's legal and political reading

differed from that of all his American contemporaries. His favorite authors lived farther back in time and in more distant lands: in the seventeenth and even the sixteenth century rather than in the eighteenth century; in Italy rather than Scotland; and in medieval England and ancient Greece and Rome. Many Americans, especially New Englanders, knew of and admired James Harrington's *Oceana*, but Adams carefully studied that complex work. Most Americans who had ever heard of Machiavelli dismissed the author of *The Prince* as a treacherous cynic, but Adams read the Florentine's *Discourses* with equal care. By 1776 Adams already lived in a rather different intellectual world from that of his countrymen. Over the next decade, this gap would only widen.

The second marker of Adams's distinctive thought was his growing commitment to the traditional English belief in a tripartite legislature, the institutional expression of a broader belief in the relationship of the political world to an inherently tripartite social structure. In this legislature, a lower house represented the people, or the democratic principle; an upper house embodied society's aristocratic forces; and a single king, president, or governor, however chosen, expressed the executive power without which the whole polity could not survive, and the whole society could not prosper. Unmistakable expressions of this conviction appear in Adams's writings from 1766 to *Thoughts on Government*, but it first became a major issue for John Adams as he sought, in vain, to incorporate the principle in the body of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780. Thereafter, it would appear again, in nearly all his major political works, into his long and productive retirement.

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PART TWO

ADAMS ON HIS OWN

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VI

Defending Executive Authority

1775–1780

I am clear for Three Branches, in the Legislature, and the Committee have reported as much, tho aukwardly expressed. . . . The Executive, which ought to be the Reservoir of Wisdom, as the Legislature is of Liberty, without this Weapon of Defence will be run down like a Hare before the Hunters.

To Elbridge Gerry, 4 November 1779

When John Adams took the floor of Congress in the fall of 1775 to speak on New Hampshire's petition for guidance from Congress in reforming its government, he confronted, for the first time, the issue of executive authority in the now suddenly autonomous American colonies. He had often had occasion to think about Massachusetts's governor, as a provincial resident, voter, lawyer, and town officer and briefly as a legislator. And he had both written and spoken about executive power in Massachusetts and Britain, notably in his "Clarendon" essays of 1766, in his oration at Braintree in 1772, and in his *Letters of Novanglus* in the winter of 1775. But on nearly every previous occasion, he had merely sought to understand the character and extent of the executive authority of the royal governors under whom he lived and worked and to appraise, explain, and defend that authority to his readers. He did expand his appraisal in March 1775 by asserting, in the seventh letter of *Novanglus*, that the vast executive powers of the king of Great Britain were compatible with a republican form of government. Before October 1775, however, he had never been called upon to say what he thought the structure, role, and content of executive power in a government of free men ought to be.

Adams's early and continued endorsement of the executive authority that he had always known was a part of his larger commitment to the traditional tripartite structure of both British and Massachusetts government. Those governments' essential components were their executives, which included hereditary monarchs and their deputies in Britain and the royal governors in Boston; their

legislatures, Britain's bicameral Parliament and Massachusetts's bicameral General Court; and all those adult male inhabitants, in Britain and Massachusetts, who qualified, by tradition and statutory law, as voters and jurors. Binding together these disparate entities was a tripartite legislative structure—often called by Adams "the legislative power"—with equal roles for the executive; an upper house, with inherited and royally appointed members in Britain, and legislatively nominated members in Massachusetts; and a popularly elected lower house.[1]

It was John Adams's firm, lifelong belief that at a fundamental social level, in terms appropriate to every British American colony, and to every republican government anywhere, all these tripartite structures could be reduced to a designated individual (or, as a distinctly less desirable option, a board comprising a small number of individuals) who embodied the executive principle; an aristocracy, which typically possessed its own institutions of government, like the House of Lords in England, and most governors' councils in America; and the people, who were represented by their chosen spokesmen, some of whom, as in Britain's House of Commons, were socially quite indistinguishable from aristocrats, while many others, especially in the lower legislative houses in America, were of a more popular character.

As Britain's North American empire began to disintegrate and imperial executive authority collapsed in one province after another in 1775, John Adams, like most of his congressional colleagues, gradually came to understand that the traditional institutions of Anglo-American government could be altered and, to resist British power effectively, should be altered. By the spring of 1776, nearly all congressmen concluded that their provincial governments must change fundamentally if Americans were to defend their liberties by the most effective means: declaring independence and seeking foreign alliances. Adams eagerly embraced this challenge but sharply disagreed with several of his colleagues over the particular forms that the required constitutional alterations should take.

While Adams readily accepted the institutional transformation of American government, and in several cases suggested and even designed those changes, both for other states in 1776 and for his own in 1779, he never abandoned his belief that human societies were inherently structured around the three concepts of executive authority, aristocratic power, and democratic liberty. He held this conviction in 1766, when he wrote his "Clarendon" essays; in 1776, when he wrote *Thoughts on Government*; and in 1786, when he sat down to compose his monumental *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*. In 1766 his political faith was comfortably within the mainstream of Anglo-American thought; in 1776 it was rapidly approaching one bank of that mainstream; by 1786 his thought was flowing in its own channel, while the dominant political thought of his countrymen was carving out a new and different course.[2]

In these two eventful decades, Adams's vision of the proper political roles for the aristocratic and democratic classes in society, and of the particular merits and weaknesses of each class, changed considerably. But during this entire period, his beliefs about the proper definition and scope of the executive remained remarkably unchanged. To appreciate this, one must first understand how he described and defined the executive during the provincial period of his life, which effectively ended with Lexington and Concord, the event that compelled John Adams to consider American independence.

1. Adams's Conception of Executive Authority

In the broadest republican tradition, which for John Adams embraced constitutional monarchy, the executive occupied a unique position, both within the commonly perceived tripartite structure of every human society and in the particular governments created by particular societies. The executive alone, at least in theory, neither represented nor embodied any one social class, in part because most societies vested executive authority in a single person who inherited this position, rather than being elected to it. In any nation with a resident monarch, the sense of distance from his or her subjects was somewhat diminished by a royal family of some size that was well known to the aristocracy and, in some smaller countries, to several of the common people as well. Moreover, in many nations the king or prince was still a visible and sometimes a vital military leader. None of this was ever true, however, in colonial America. John Adams's conception of his distant monarch was essentially functional; he deeply appreciated the importance of the office but gave little thought to the personality of its occupant.

In this, there is a certain irony. As Americans developed the constitutional grounds for their claim to a broad autonomy within the British Empire, most expansively in John Adams's own essays, they asserted that their connection to Britain was entirely through the person of the king. Very few colonists, of course, had ever seen the king, imagined that they ever would see him, or had any strong desire to see him. Great distances, however, did not diminish the monarch's authority. It was his very impersonality that made him the first essential element in any tripartite constitutional government. Because he properly represented no one social interest or class, he alone could represent the whole people, and could mediate between individual men and groups of men who unquestionably did represent or embody distinct social classes. This unique capacity of monarchy was essential to the executive authority of George III.[3]

John Adams held exactly this view of the executive, in Britain and America, and expressed it on many occasions before, during, and after 1776. In 1766, as "Clarendon," he stated that "the king is by the constitution, supreme executor of the laws." When Adams set out three kinds of monarchy in his notes for his oration at Braintree in 1772, he defined his second type, which he would later, in his

Letters of Novanglus, connect explicitly with Britain, as one in which "the supreme Power is not in a single Person but in the Laws, the Administration being committed solely to the Prince." In his seventh *Novanglus* letter, in March 1775, he declared that "the British constitution is nothing more nor less than a republic, in which the king is first magistrate"; it merited the republican label because it created "a government of laws, and not of men." And when he looked back nearly five decades to his service on the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence, Adams remembered his reservations about some of the passionate language in Thomas Jefferson's text. Although he well understood the value of indicting George III for his political crimes in a document that was designed to justify, to all the nations of the world, Congress's decision to declare America's independence, he remarked: "I would not have . . . called the King a tyrant. I thought this was too personal; for I never believed George to be a tyrant in disposition and in nature; I always believed him to be deceived by his courtiers on both sides of the Atlantic, and in his official capacity only, cruel."[4]

Over the course of his long life, John Adams always treated the executive office in any constitutional monarchy with respect, but he rarely expressed the slightest feelings of admiration or affection, or of scorn or hatred, for Britain's royal monarch. He showed the same respect for any executive office in America, although not always for every occupant of such office. This was in marked contrast to his passionate characterizations of aristocracy in America, which were usually negative, or of the people in America's several colonies and states, and in the nation as a whole, which were more often positive. In *Thoughts on Government* in 1776, Adams omitted any descriptive language or formal labels for the office of governor, an institution that he strongly urged the colonies to retain as they became independent states. And in his own creation, the 1779 draft of a new constitution for Massachusetts, he first described the executive, as he had in *Novanglus*, simply as "the first magistrate" but then elevated him to "supreme executive Magistrate," with the honorific title of "His Excellency."[5]

On one dimension of the executive's power, however, Adams was insistent, from the Stamp Act crisis until his death. He believed that the executive in any free government must be a distinct part of that government's legislative power. As "Clarendon" in 1766, he stated: "In the power of legislation, the King, Lords, Commons, and People, are to be considered as essential and fundamental parts of the constitution." This pronouncement expressed, with one significant addition—the people—the common British idea that ultimate sovereignty resided in King-in-Parliament, a concept that Adams did not completely abandon even as he moved to embrace the Lockean maxim that ultimate sovereignty rested solely in the people.[6]

As the crisis in relations with Britain grew more acute in Massachusetts, Adams held fast to the executive's inclusion in the legislative power. In 1772 at Braintree, he declared that in one kind of monarchy, of obvious relevance to

Britain, "the Nobles or Commons or both have a check upon all the Acts of Legislation of the Prince." And he later remembered that in June 1775, while attending the Second Continental Congress, he had expressed the hope to his colleagues John Rutledge and John Sullivan that in all constitutional reforms in any colony "the three Branches of a Legislature would be preserved, an Executive, independent of the Senate or Council and the House," a caution that he repeated to the full Congress in October 1775.[7] He succinctly summarized this principle in his November 1775 letter to Richard Henry Lee: "Let the Governor, Council, and House be each a distinct and independent Branch of the Legislature, and have a Negative on all Laws." In April 1776, in *Thoughts on Government*, he elaborated: "[L]et a [distinct] Assembly be constituted, as a mediator between the two extreme branches of the legislature, that which represents the people and that which is invested with the executive power. . . . [and then select] a Governor; who, after being stripped of most of those badges of domination called prerogatives, should have a free and independent exercise of his judgment, and be made also an integral part of the legislature."[8]

This independent legislative power of the executive was a traditional feature of the English constitution, and it survived the revolutionary settlement of 1689. But the course of eighteenth-century British politics radically transformed the monarch's formal legislative role. Royal vetoes ceased after 1709 and were considered out of the question by the era of the American Revolution. In their place, British monarchs developed an impressive capacity to promote, shape, or defeat major legislative initiatives through their unquestioned right to choose their principal ministers, most of whom sat in Parliament, and by their extensive power to influence individual members of the House of Commons through patronage, both during sessions of that chamber and in elections to it.[9]

John Adams, however, adhered to the older model of the executive as a formal legislator who had a smaller presence in either legislative chamber but retained an unquestioned right to approve or veto any bill passed by both chambers. In defining the executive in this fashion, Adams was replicating not the monarchy of eighteenth-century Britain but the legislative process of Massachusetts and every other British colony in America. Whether a colony had a unicameral or a bicameral legislature, and a governor appointed by the Crown or by a proprietor, or even chosen by the people, its legislative process always included the executive. Every governor had the right to veto any bill, and if a royal governor did approve a bill, the Crown, through a routine review by the Board of Trade, which forwarded its appraisal to the Privy Council for final action, got a second chance to void the legislation. Both British America's provincial governors and the royal monarch, through his ministers and servants, held direct legislative power in America.[10]

In accepting and indeed insisting on a formal legislative role for the executive after 1776, Adams surprised and eventually dismayed many of his countrymen

in two ways. First, he was defending and, in his draft of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, seeking to perpetuate a major feature of colonial government, a governor with veto power over his legislature, which many Americans were eager to escape. Second, he was, at the very least, qualifying the traditional republican adherence to the separation of powers, a doctrine to which Adams himself appeared to pledge his fidelity both in his *Letters of Novanglus* and in *Thoughts on Government* and, most emphatically of all, in his draft of the Massachusetts Constitution.[11]

2. The Emerging States Search for a Republican Executive

Governors in eighteenth-century British America varied widely in their personality, competence, and political goals, but in eleven of the thirteen rebelling colonies they shared one thing in common: they were selected by Crown officers or by proprietors in Britain upon whom a few Americans could occasionally exert some influence but over whom no Americans ever had any real control. The relationship of these outsider executives to their assemblies, from New Hampshire to Georgia, was typically one of endemic struggle over a host of issues, punctuated in several provinces by shorter periods of cooperation. In the decade before the Coercive Acts, nearly every colonial governor had difficulty containing the anger of his legislature and his people over at least three parliamentary statutes: the Stamp Act (1765), the Townshend Revenue Act (1767), and the Tea Act (1773). And in the so called quiet period (1771–73), immediately prior to the Tea Act, the governors of three large colonies, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and South Carolina, became embroiled in bitter controversies with local leaders that nearly paralyzed their administrations. Until the spring of 1774, however, the executives in most royal and proprietary governments in British North America commanded at least a bare minimum of obedience from their subjects. In six of the thirteen colonies that would soon rebel—New Hampshire, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and Georgia—the governors were even liked and respected.[12]

Britain's closing of the Port of Boston in retaliation for the Tea Party, followed closely by the Massachusetts Government Act, and in the following spring by Lexington and Concord, abruptly altered the political equation in nearly every mainland colony. In New England the termination of royal authority was precipitous. Massachusetts's Governor Thomas Gage lost all authority outside Boston in September 1774; New Hampshire's Governor John Wentworth fled his capital in May 1775; and Rhode Island's locally elected governor, upon opposing taking up arms, was promptly suspended by the legislature. Only Connecticut's locally elected Governor Jonathan Trumbull, who strongly opposed British authority, remained in office until the conclusion of the War for Independence.[13]

Britain's hold on the middle and southern colonies loosened more gradually but just as decisively. New York's Governor Tryon clung tenaciously to some

part of his royal authority until the fall of 1775, when he fled to a British warship. In New Jersey, Governor William Franklin, Benjamin Franklin's son, held the last meeting of his administration in the fall of 1775; finally arrested at the direction of Congress in June 1776, he was then held under guard in Connecticut. William Penn's grandson, Governor John Penn, who presided over both Pennsylvania and Delaware, held on longer by simply ignoring the rebellion, but in July 1776 Pennsylvania abolished the office of governor and placed him under an easy house arrest. In Maryland, Lord Baltimore's son-in-law, Governor Robert Eden, was so well liked and so determined to ignore the rebellion around him that he was not forced into exile until June 1776, making him the last executive appointed from Britain to be expelled from his colony. Only the four royal governors south of the Potomac, Virginia's Lord Dunmore, North Carolina's Josiah Martin, South Carolina's Lord William Campbell, and Georgia's James Wright, forcibly resisted the rebellion, but each was driven from his capital in 1775 and then defeated and exiled by force of arms in 1776.[14]

Because most of these governors had been born in Great Britain, and nearly all were selected by men who lived in Britain and answered to British officials who could have them removed at any time, often without regard to either their popularity or their proven effectiveness in office, the course of executive authority in the provinces had rarely been untroubled for very long. When the sudden embrace of armed rebellion after Lexington turned out one governor after another, Americans were strongly tempted to reject the office itself. Yet many royal and proprietary governors had performed their executive duties effectively, and most colonies had only an intermittent experience with plural executives, in the form of councils with temporary plenary power. This dual reality—the colonists' widespread dislike of executive authority in the only form they had ever known it, coupled with their lack of a real knowledge of any alternative—shaped their search for new executive authority. That search began in Massachusetts in 1775; and after various adventures in nearly a dozen colonies and newly independent states, and in Congress, it reached its climax, again in Massachusetts, in 1780. John Adams, deeply involved in this search at its beginning but soon distracted by other duties in America and Europe, would return to the heart of this quest to frame its greatest achievement, the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780.

Looking back some three decades from his retirement, John Adams remembered the temper of the Second Continental Congress in June 1775, when the delegates received Massachusetts's request for guidance in strengthening its government. He dated his earliest public advocacy of a three-branch legislature, with "an Executive, independent of the Senate or Council[,] and the House," from that event.[15] But Adams probably did not advocate for a single executive in response to Massachusetts's petition. His congressional colleagues had apparently arranged with provincial leaders to propose the plan that Congress recommended on 9 June 1775. Congress advised Massachusetts's Provincial Congress

to call an election for a new House of Representatives, which would choose a Council. These actions would create a bicameral General Court in the same manner, and on the same numerical principles, that the province had followed since 1692. The legislature would then declare the governor's chair vacant and assign all necessary executive functions to the Council. In his autobiography, Adams also remembered discussing his preference for a single executive possessing legislative authority with two congressional colleagues that June, but did not say that he formally proposed it to Congress. Moreover, as soon as Massachusetts executed the plan that Congress recommended, he accepted a position on the new Council; he sat on the Council in August, and again in December and January; and until April 1776 he never criticized the structure of government of his native province, even in private letters.[16]

Thus it happened that when New Hampshire requested constitutional guidance from Congress in October 1775, John Adams found himself in the potentially awkward position of advocating, on the floor of Congress, the kind of strong, single executive that the newly reformed government of Massachusetts still lacked. He well remembered the congressional resistance to his argument: "I knew that every one of my friends, and all those who were the most zealous for assuming Government, had at that time no Idea of any other Government but a Contemptible legislature in one assembly, with Committees for Executive Magistrates and Judges."[17]

By midfall, however, the fiscal and administrative demands made by the rebellion on colonial governments were greater than they had been in the late spring. When Massachusetts reformed its government, its royal governor was still present in the province, even if the legislature declared his seat vacant. In October 1775, however, New Hampshire's Governor John Wentworth had already departed and was on his way to England. And since June, royal governors had abandoned their seats in Virginia and the Carolinas. South Carolina's petition for guidance in changing its government was presented to Congress in November. That same November, New York's Governor Tryon fled from Manhattan, and New Jersey's Governor William Franklin held his last meeting with his council. Each of these provinces urgently needed an effective executive. But Adams, who implored Congress to recommend a common set of constitutional guidelines to all the colonies and threw out several proposals for structural reform, while taking care "always to bear my testimony against every plan of an unbalanced Government," still made little headway. Congress would only recommend, to both New Hampshire and South Carolina, "such a form of Government, as in [their representatives'] Judgment will best produce the happiness of the people." And neither colony adopted a new government until the winter of 1776, when both New Hampshire and South Carolina rejected the idea of a strong executive.[18]

When John Adams returned to Congress in February 1776, his conviction that local governments must have strong executives appeared to be in disrepute everywhere in America. In January, Thomas Paine had passionately endorsed unicameral, legislative-centered government in the widely read *Common Sense*. That same month New Hampshire created a bicameral legislature, without a governor, at the center of its new interim government. South Carolina would follow a similar path in framing its interim government in March.[19] In Congress, only Virginia's Richard Henry Lee had shown enough interest in Adams's ideas in the fall session to ask him for a brief plan of government. Outside the doors of Congress, only the two corporate colonies, Connecticut and Rhode Island, and the three proprietary colonies, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland, still had functioning governors, and the proprietary governors' days were numbered. The eight rebelling royal colonies had already expelled their governors.

But in March 1776, America's zeal to reject executive authority began to cool. The reasons for this change of heart remain somewhat unclear, but at least two factors appear likely. First was the growing fear that Britain's armed forces, which General Washington's Continental army was just then expelling from Boston, would soon return to invade other colonies, in much greater force. If and when this happened, a strong executive could help protect any threatened colony. As the War for Independence unfolded, three strong, long-term state executives, governors Jonathan Trumbull of Connecticut, George Clinton of New York, and William Livingston of New Jersey, did in fact become key players in the eventual success of the Continental army and state militia forces in preventing the British army from seizing control of the middle states. Second, many colonial leaders who were eager to cast off all British authority were not ready to place the entire force of their local governments under the control of popularly elected legislatures. John Adams's commitment to the traditional forms of republican government, with a strong executive, a bicameral legislature, and independent judges, spoke to these fears and concerns.

The request in March and April 1776 by congressmen from North Carolina, Virginia, and New Jersey that Adams prepare letters of constitutional advice for them to present to their constituents gave him the opportunity to present his ideas anew. He seized the occasion to argue for strong executives in all three provinces. Richard Henry Lee's decision to submit one of these letters to a printer produced the pamphlet *Thoughts on Government*, which became a powerful vehicle for Adams's ideas in several other colonies.[20]

The apparent effect of his letters to his colleagues, and of his pamphlet, was gratifying to Adams, but perhaps not so gratifying as he might have liked. In April 1776, North Carolina's provincial convention empowered its congressmen to support independence but deferred framing a new government to the fall. Virginia's convention in May endorsed independence, passed America's first bill

of rights, and then did write a constitution that provided for a two-house legislature and a governor. New Jersey's June–July convention also endorsed independence and created a bicameral legislature, with a governor. But neither Virginia nor New Jersey, nor Maryland and North Carolina, which drew up constitutions later in the year, fully endorsed Adams's strong executive. They all created the office of governor, which New Hampshire and South Carolina—and, indeed, Massachusetts—had evidently decided was unnecessary, but none granted their governor a veto over legislation. In Adams's terminology, they had created two-part legislatures, not the three-part legislatures he had recommended.[21]

In the spring of 1776, however, Adams had little time to express any disappointment he may have felt. By May he was fully engaged in the last stages of the campaign to persuade the middle colonies to support independence. In June, Congress named him to one of its most demanding administrative positions, president of the Board of War. To this assignment it soon added the responsibility of drawing up a model Plan of Treaties as a guide for the diplomats it was about to send to France and for those it hoped to send to other European nations. When Adams was not employed in these tasks, he contributed his share to the debates in Congress over designing America's first national constitution, the Articles of Confederation. For the next seventeen months, until his resignation from Congress in November 1777, the internal politics of every new state, including Massachusetts, took a back seat to his commitment to national unity, an effective foreign policy, and a vigorous national defense.[22]

In his private correspondence, however, Adams did take note of local constitutional developments. Two states, Pennsylvania in July 1776 and Georgia in the winter of 1777, adopted the structure of government that he had most feared since the congressional debates of the fall of 1775: a unicameral legislature and a council with executive powers. Georgia was probably too distant from Philadelphia to cause Adams much discomfort, but Pennsylvania's new government was more distressing, particularly because he had worked so hard in the spring of 1776 to coordinate the efforts of Congress and Philadelphia's radical leadership to advance the cause of independence. But if he disliked the structure of Pennsylvania's government, he admired that state's zealous support for independence, and for the strong national defense that was his primary concern. In 1776 and 1777, he refrained from publicly criticizing Pennsylvania's radical new constitution, and in June 1777, writing to Abigail, he expressed his displeasure that Benjamin Rush had revealed his authorship of *Thoughts on Government* in a Philadelphia newspaper essay that attacked that constitution. Adams's final disappointment in 1776 was the behavior of his home province. In April he urged political friends in Massachusetts to reform their constitution. Yet the legislature's failure to do so promptly would ultimately lead, after a long delay, to John Adams's greatest constitutional achievement.[23]

Not until 1777 did a newly independent state begin to appreciate Adams's argument for a strong executive. In the province of New York, both the royal governor and the established legislature began losing their authority to local committees and to the First Continental Congress in the summer and fall of 1774. When New York's royal government finally collapsed in the fall of 1775, its Revolutionary Provincial Congress and Committee of Safety moved into the vacuum. In late May 1776, in a direct response to the Second Continental Congress's resolve of 10 May, recommending the creation of new governments, and particularly to its 15 May Preamble to that resolve, written by John Adams, which urged that the new governments suppress "every kind of authority under the [British] Crown" and exercise "all the powers of government under the authority of the people," New York's current Provincial Congress called for the election of yet another Provincial Congress to form a new constitution. The impending British invasion pushed that congress, which became the first government of the independent state of New York, north to White Plains in July, where it soon charged a committee to draft a constitution. The actual British invasion pushed New York's government across the Hudson River to Fishkill in the fall, and the military difficulties of the winter delayed the committee's report until March 1777.[24]

A full month of debate in New York's ruling congress produced the most original of America's early state constitutions. The document created a clear tripartite government, with a bicameral legislature, an independent judiciary (which Virginia had been the first state to incorporate in its constitution, in June 1776), and a single, popularly elected executive, the first in America's new constitutions. Approved on 20 April 1777, New York's constitution also granted this governor a certain measure of negative legislative power—a veto over all legislation—but in a novel form. The governor joined the state's chancellor and the judges of its Supreme Court on a standing Council of Revision. This body could veto any bill passed by the legislature, but the legislature could override that veto by a two-thirds majority in each house. This was hardly the equal participation in the legislative process that John Adams had favored for the executive since 1775, and had advocated in *Thoughts on Government* in 1776, but it was a start. The next major chapter in America's constitutional history would be written in Massachusetts itself.[25]

3. Massachusetts's Political Wilderness

During more than a year of rapid constitutional change from New Hampshire to Georgia, several states moved toward John Adams's conception of ideal republics, with single executives, bicameral legislatures, and independent judiciaries: first Virginia and New Jersey, then Maryland and North Carolina, all in 1776; and, even more decisively, New York in early 1777. Several other states—New Hampshire, South Carolina, Delaware, and Pennsylvania in 1776, and

Georgia and the hopeful state of Vermont in 1777—rejected his argument for a strong executive, and two of these states, Pennsylvania and Georgia, plus Vermont, adopted unicameral legislatures. The corporate colonies, Connecticut and Rhode Island, already fully autonomous, needed only to strike out a few phrases in their charters that subordinated them to the British Crown to create independent republics.[26]

Only one state remained deeply reluctant to reform its government after July 1775. Following its resurrection of its General Court and its decision to vest executive powers in its Council that summer, Massachusetts had reestablished its judicial courts by the winter of 1776, supported the Continental army's expulsion of the last British forces in March, and welcomed independence in July, all without a governor. Despite urgent local protests and deep misgivings by several elite leaders over the lack of a more effective constitution, the legislature approached the whole subject with extreme caution. Why did John Adams's native province, the first to defy British authority and the first to claim the powers of an independent government, become the last state during the War for Independence to create a new constitution?[27]

One answer lies in the thorough transformation of Massachusetts politics before the outbreak of war in 1775. In every other American colony that rebelled from Britain, significant constitutional change began only after Lexington and Concord. In Massachusetts, however, the Governor's Council had firmly allied with its assembly against its royal governor as early as 1766, scores of towns began to question royal authority in 1768, and the House of Representatives, the Council, and the great majority of the towns had become thoroughly alienated from Governor Thomas Hutchinson before the Boston Tea Party. The province's rejection of the Massachusetts Government Act the following summer was both sudden and dramatic, but it was hardly surprising. Royal authority essentially ended in Massachusetts in September 1774, but it was already hollowed out when Bostonians cast the East India Company's tea into the harbor the previous December.

One effect of this early political transformation was to leave relatively few Loyalists in public office in Massachusetts on the eve of the Revolution. There were still many highly visible, relatively affluent supporters of the Crown, but compared with Loyalist leaders in several other colonies, they had only meager popular support and had already become quite isolated before the Coercive Acts. Their numbers in both the House and Council were small, and they dominated few town governments. Massachusetts's only substantially Loyalist occupational group was the mercantile elite of Boston and Salem; the only professional class with many Loyalists was John Adams's own, the members of the provincial bar. Loyalists still dominated the Superior Court into the spring of 1774, and several held other judicial posts, but by the summer, when Governor Gage appealed for support from all those loyal to the Crown, he discovered that

he had too small a civil force to project his authority beyond the reach of his vastly outnumbered army.[28]

Massachusetts's Patriots, however, were numerous everywhere, even among the most prominent ranks in society, and were the acknowledged leaders of nearly every community. As royal government collapsed in 1774, those who had opposed governors Bernard and Hutchinson since the Stamp Act were ready to fill any position: representative or councilor, sheriff, justice of the peace or Superior Court judge, militia captain, major, or colonel. Many Patriots already occupied these positions when Governor Gage arrived, and several had held them for many years. In contrast to some colonies, notably New York and Pennsylvania, where the Revolution would soon sweep out scores of "old men" and bring in many more scores of "new men," Massachusetts was so well provided with experienced Patriot leaders that any structural deficiency in the new interim government entrusted with resisting British authority was less apparent than it would otherwise have been.[29]

Political tradition also exerted a strong appeal in Massachusetts, perhaps a stronger appeal than in any other colony. This may help to explain why the General Court made no move to elect a governor after the last British officeholders departed in March 1776, nor even after Massachusetts became an independent state in July. By that date, the government could boast of a functioning judicial system and legislature that closely resembled, in size and structure, the institutions Massachusetts had employed for nearly a century. The admiration that John Adams had openly expressed for the political history and culture of his native province in the 1760s, and would continue to express into the late 1770s, was shared by many of his neighbors. This local pride made some reluctant to alter their political system; it made others, who were more critical of Massachusetts's political establishment in 1776, determined to make any changes with great care.[30]

Finally, while most of the rebelling colonies faced coastal raids, invasions into the backcountry, and extensive campaigns by British forces throughout the War for Independence, Massachusetts, after its bloody baptisms at Lexington and Bunker Hill, was virtually free of British regulars from April 1776 until the conclusion of peace in 1783. Britain's navy did mount a somewhat effective blockade of the Massachusetts coast for three years after its army had evacuated Boston, but the state largely escaped the occasional assaults directed at various ports on the Rhode Island and Connecticut coasts. Massachusetts contributed more soldiers to the Continental army throughout the war than any other state, but those soldiers served, often for several years, in other states. Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey, the three states with the strongest and longest serving Patriot governors during the war, were far more exposed to the British army and navy and, in the case of New York and New Jersey, to endemic conflict between Loyalists and local militia units, as well as to raids by Indian tribes on the

New York frontier. Had Massachusetts faced such protracted violence at home, the state might have been forced to elect a single governor with strong executive powers much sooner than it did.[31]

The provincial traditions and parochial circumstances that favored Massachusetts's political status quo in 1776, however, should not obscure other local realities. In the first year of American independence many residents of Massachusetts, and some whole regions of the state, were not happy with the general structure of their new government, although there was wide disagreement over the architectural changes needed to improve it. Many wished to replace the Council's executive authority with a strong governor. Others wished to abolish the Council completely and have a unicameral legislature. Moreover, the behavior of several of their lawmakers hardly assured the voters that rule by the arrogant plural office-holding elites they had often endured under royal government was now behind them.[32]

Perhaps the most critical issue, however, was the nature and future of the courts. Voters throughout Massachusetts regarded the authority, personnel, and performance of their judiciary as sadly lacking. Farmers in central and western Massachusetts, in just those areas that would support Shays's Rebellion a decade later, deeply resented the expense and the mercantile bias of the courts, often regarded them as utterly without legitimacy, and on occasion even tried to shut them down. In eastern Massachusetts, the more commercially oriented population held the opposite view; for them the courts, even in their own counties, were too weak and inactive. The new judicial system announced so grandly in the proclamation of January 1776, of which John Adams was the virtually certain author, was not taking hold. From the Atlantic coast to the Berkshire Hills, Massachusetts was in danger of becoming a legal wilderness. The apparent decision of the General Court in the spring of 1776 to proceed into another legislative year without taking any steps to frame a new constitution was not widely popular.[33]

Massachusetts's government by assembly and council, an arrangement that John Adams had so feared in Congress in the fall of 1775, also had critics within the highest ranks of its political class from the outset. One of the most persistent was James Warren, who was chosen Speaker of the House of Representatives in the new government in July 1775. This consummate insider had first expressed his anxiety to John Adams about taking any decisive constitutional action in May 1775, immediately before the province petitioned the Continental Congress for guidance. He repeated his doubts as soon as Congress encouraged Massachusetts to reinstate its legislature in June. His election as Speaker the following month did nothing to calm his fears.[34]

From John Adams's departure for the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia in the spring of 1775 until his return to Massachusetts following his first diplomatic mission in Europe in the summer of 1779, James Warren was

his closest political confidant in Massachusetts, except for his wife, Abigail. Adams read his friend's concerns about Massachusetts politics and evidently shared some portion of them, but he initially expressed his own doubts in the mildest terms, dryly remarking in June 1775, "Your Government was the best We could obtain for you." And he refrained from directly criticizing Massachusetts's structure of government until April 1776. Adams must have wanted the same strong executive for his home colony that he was recommending to other colonies in the fall of 1775, but he deferred expressing this or any specific criticism of Massachusetts's government for almost a year. In the course of that year, he not only accepted a seat on the provincial Council but wrote its January 1776 address to the people, explaining and defending the current government.[35]

When John Adams finally broke his silence in April 1776 to urge his friends in Massachusetts to prepare a new constitution immediately, his national vantage point and his personal situation in Congress may have influenced him as much as his belief that his province now enjoyed greater political freedom following the evacuation of the last British regulars from Boston in March. Peace and secure control over all of its territory for the first time since 1774 did make the spring of 1776 a propitious moment for Massachusetts to create a new government. But for Adams, the political pressures he felt in Philadelphia to advance the cause of independence was the strongest inducement to call for action. By mid-April, he and his cousin Samuel had become heavily involved in Pennsylvania's pro-independence movement; his *Thoughts on Government* was just coming off the press; and he had just received Abigail Adams's most celebrated letter, in which she urged her husband, "in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make" for the colonies, to "Remember the Ladies." For his wife, his colleagues in Congress, and the general public, no one in America was more closely identified with the effort to secure complete independence from Britain than John Adams. And no one was as closely identified with the movement to create new governments with strong executives—governors with independent powers—in every new state.[36]

Adams first hinted at the urgency for constitutional reform in Massachusetts as a measure that would advance the drive for independence in a letter to General William Heath, dated 15 April, just one day after he replied to Abigail's plea to "Remember the Ladies." On 22 April, the same day on which his pamphlet *Thoughts on Government* appeared for sale in Philadelphia, he wrote more candidly to James Warren. After briefly setting the political scene in "the United Colonies," whose "Management [to achieve independence] requires the Meekness of Moses, the Patience of Job and the Wisdom of Solomon, added to the Valour of Daniel," Adams assessed the growing sentiment for independence in several colonies, and then turned to Massachusetts: "I think it is now the precise Point of Time for our Council and House of Representatives, either to proceed to make such Alterations in our Constitution as they may judge proper, or to

Send a Petition to Philadelphia for the Consent of Congress to do it. It will give Life and Activity and Energy to all the other Colonies. Four Months ago, or indeed at any Time Since you assumed a Government, it might have been disagreeable and perhaps dangerous. But it is quite otherwise now." He then urged Warren to persuade the legislature to alter its instructions to its delegates in Congress so they could vote for independence.[37]

When Adams wrote to Warren, it was already too late for the sitting legislature to respond to his exhortation, even if the Speaker had appealed to the lawmakers to initiate constitutional reform as soon as he received Adams's letter. The 1775–76 assembly adjourned on 10 May; its successor, elected in the towns soon thereafter, convened at Watertown on 29 May. On 12 May, just as he was drafting his radical Preamble to Congress's Resolution of 10 May, which exhorted all the states to create governments independent of the Crown, Adams wrote again to Warren to express his hope that Massachusetts's legislature would alter the colony's constitution immediately. He made his strongest appeal for secure salaries for judges but said he did not expect the lawmakers to create a governor with a veto over legislation; they could simply make their chief executive the president, and a voting member, of the Council. In June and July, in letters to other political friends in Massachusetts, he kept inquiring what the legislature had done to prepare a new frame of government, and he kept urging the creation of an executive officer to strengthen the Council. But not until August did he learn that the new House of Representatives had finally begun to consider writing a new constitution for their now independent state.[38]

The newly elected lawmakers were in fact concerned about the larger structure and future vitality of their government from the outset, and in early June they named a committee to consider the issue. But intermittent, contradictory pressures from different areas of the state and from different social classes, and changes in the composition of the General Court itself, made many members hesitant to act. In September 1776, they formally asked their constituents whether they, the legislators, should proceed to draft a new constitution. The response from the towns was generally favorable, but not overwhelmingly positive, and a few communities openly challenged the right of the legislature to make a constitution. The strongest objection came from Concord, which declared that a constitution alterable by the legislature "is no Security at all to the Subject against any Encroachment of the Governing part on any, or on all of their Rights and privileges." Therefore, "it appears to this Town highly necessary and Expedient that a Convention, or Congress be immediately Chosen, to form and establish a Constitution." A legislative committee named in January 1777 to study the returns was impressed with this argument and recommended the election of a constitutional convention, but the full House voted against it by a heavy majority and deferred the issue to the next legislature. Samuel Eliot

Morison observed that had the chamber adopted its committee's report, "much time and energy would have been saved."[39]

The next General Court, elected in May 1777, resolved to draft a new constitution, but its progress was slow. Petitions from several parts of the state had demanded that whatever the court created must be submitted to the voters for ratification. Not until March 1778 did a still divided and uncertain legislature finally submit a constitution to the people. Their opposition to the Constitution of 1778 was immediate, sharp, and well organized. An Essex County convention meeting in April–May 1778 approved a long critique written by the conservative Newburyport lawyer Theophilus Parsons, which quickly became known as "the Essex Result." But the proposed constitution was equally unpopular in the poorer, more radical agricultural counties to the west. In June, Massachusetts voters overwhelmingly defeated the Constitution of 1778. Nearly every town disliked the proposed frame of government, and in rejecting it, a much larger number than in 1776 attacked the General Court for presuming to write it at all. Following Concord's early lead, they insisted that a new constitution must be written by a convention chosen for that purpose, a body that would be totally distinct from the legislature.[40]

The legislature of 1778–79 learned from its predecessor's mistakes. In February 1779, it asked the voters to declare, when they elected the next General Court in May, whether they wished to choose delegates to a separate constitutional convention that summer. Majorities in over two-thirds of the towns whose returns survive accepted this plan, and in June the new legislature set 1 September as the date for the constitutional convention and authorized the election of delegates at any time up to mid-August. In early August, John Adams, who had departed for his first diplomatic mission to France just prior to the legislature's submission of the Constitution of 1778 to the voters, unexpectedly returned to Massachusetts.[41]

Adams had played only a small role in his state's internal politics since Independence. He resigned his seat on the Massachusetts Council in April 1776, and his position as chief justice of the Superior Court, on which he had never actively served, in February 1777. From February 1776 to November 1777, with just one break in Massachusetts from November 1776 to January 1777, he was totally involved in the work of Congress, attending sessions in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Philadelphia again, and finally York, Pennsylvania, as that body moved from town to town to avoid the invading British army. For the greater part of the three-month period following his resignation from Congress and return to Massachusetts in November 1777, most of his attention was devoted to preparing for his first diplomatic mission; he sailed for France in mid-February 1778.[42]

Adams's only substantive contribution to the discussion of constitutional issues by Massachusetts leaders while he was in Congress was a long letter of

26 May 1776 to James Sullivan, in which he argued forcefully for retaining Massachusetts's property-based franchise. The solution to an overly restricted pool of voters, he asserted, was not to broaden the qualifications for voting but, in good Harringtonian fashion, to ensure that the ownership of property remained as broad as possible so that the electorate would be immune from the influence of powerful men who would seek to buy the support of poor voters without property.[43]

Following his correspondence with his Massachusetts friends on constitutional issues in the spring and summer of 1776, Adams wrote no more on the matter until the spring of 1777. Then, in an exchange of some half dozen letters with James Warren between April and July 1777, he made no new suggestions but again hoped that the General Court was making progress toward drafting a constitution. Again, he was disappointed. Not until December 1777, when he was back in Braintree and preparing for his diplomatic mission in France, did he learn that the legislature at last appeared prepared to present a constitution to the people. When it did, in March 1778, John Adams was halfway across the Atlantic Ocean.[44]

Some three months after taking up lodgings at Passy, Benjamin Franklin's residence outside Paris, and beginning his diplomatic labors, Adams received the first letter directed to him in France from James Warren, who informed him that Massachusetts voters were about to reject the Constitution of 1778. He also received local newspapers from Thomas Cushing, and perhaps from James Warren, that may have included the texts of the Constitution of 1778 and the Essex Result, as well as other constitutional commentary. But his expression of concern at the sharp division over the 1778 constitution in his replies to Cushing and Warren reveals no knowledge of either document. Nowhere does he give any hint of what he thought of the constitution itself, and no correspondent is known to have sent him a personal opinion of it. From this point until his return to Massachusetts at the beginning of August 1779, he made no further reference to the issue.[45]

The whole course of John Adams's response to Massachusetts's efforts to create a new constitution from the spring of 1776 until his return from Europe in the summer of 1779 appears, in its own way, as surprising as his state's difficulties in framing a foundation document and securing its approval. The political leaders of Massachusetts were not opposed to reforming their government; they knew the state needed more executive capacity and both a legislature and a court system that would command broader popular respect. But in 1776 and 1777, they had great difficulty determining what manner of government would satisfy the conflicting interests of their coastal and interior regions, of their merchants and their farmers, their several small cities and their many expanding rural towns. And in 1778, when they finally thought they had arrived at an acceptable but by no means a perfect answer, Massachusetts's voters rejected that answer and forced a full reconsideration of the problem.[46]

For his part, Adams was evidently too distracted from 1776 to the summer of 1779 by his national and then international obligations to begin to comprehend the local issues that would determine if, and how, Massachusetts could create a new constitution. His sporadic correspondence with his Massachusetts friends shows that he soon came to understand this. From April to July 1776, he was insistent that the lawmakers draft a new constitution immediately, but his primary motive seemed to be advancing the cause of independence, and then in seeing his native state, of which he was always proud, defend its honor by joining the other states in creating sound new republics. In 1776 he was more interested in quick results than in the best possible form of government. This is clear from his remark to James Warren, in his letter of 12 May, that he did not "expect, nor indeed desire that it should be attempted to give the Governor a Negative, in our Colony. Make him President [of the Council], with a casting vote."[47]

This hardly seems compatible with his exhortation to Congress, in the fall of 1775, to urge the colonies to retain strong executives, or with similar advice he had just incorporated in *Thoughts on Government*. It flatly contradicted his principal objective when he came to draft a constitution for Massachusetts in 1779. But it did anticipate his more relaxed attitude in 1777 toward creating a strong executive or recommending any specific inclusions in whatever constitution his native state would devise. In three letters to James Warren written in the spring and early summer of that year, he still expressed his wish to see the state frame a constitution, but in May he worried that if the General Court had to submit its work to the people for approval, it would divide and distract them. He finished, however, by declaring "their Will be done. If they suit themselves they will please me." In June, he again worried that securing a constitution could create "hurtfull Divisions, or Altercations." But again, he concluded: "Whatever the Majority determine, I hope the Minority will chearfully concur in. The fatal Experience of Pensylvania, has made me dread nothing So much as Disunion, upon this Point." In July, he voiced the fear that Massachusetts might make too popular a government by allowing all men, irrespective of property, to vote for the Council as well as the House. But he wished Warren "Joy of your Employment in making a Constitution. Hope you will make a good one. I hope to Sit quietly under it, although I shall have no hand in forming it." And writing from Europe in 1778, he said even less, only repeating his fear of political discord when he learned of the contentious vote over the Constitution of 1778.[48]

It is hard to escape the conclusion that between 1776 and 1778 John Adams was even less engaged, intellectually or emotionally, than Massachusetts's established political leadership in confronting the challenge of making a new constitution for the state. The General Court finally did take the issue seriously, and after the Constitution of 1778 was defeated, it conceded the point, first made by a few towns in 1776, that only a constitutional convention could solve its dilemma. But John Adams, thoroughly absorbed in his diplomatic labors until

early 1779, was farther removed from this dark forest of partisan politics than ever before. He evidently had not the slightest idea that he would ever reenter that wilderness to address again the issue of constitutional reform, until the day he returned to Braintree in August. At this point, America's most profound constitutional scholar was suddenly handed the opportunity to reengage in his favorite subject, the nature of republican government. Adams seized this opportunity to rejoin the battle he had led in 1775 and early 1776: the struggle to achieve constitutional balance through the elevation of executive authority.

4. John Adams Writes a Constitution

When John Adams arrived in Braintree at the beginning of August, Massachusetts voters were going to the polls to choose delegates to the constitutional convention they had authorized in May. Although Adams had not been well informed about his state's politics since his departure for Europe, his Braintree neighbors promptly chose him to represent the town in that convention, and on the first of September he dutifully attended the opening session in Cambridge. Over the following week, the convention elected its officers and named a large committee to prepare and report a constitution at the end of October. Adams was named to that committee, which met in Boston on 13 September, and chose him, his cousin Samuel, and the convention's president, James Bowdoin, to be a subcommittee that would prepare the first draft of the text. John Adams's elders, deferring to his vastly greater legal and constitutional knowledge, entrusted virtually the entire composition to him.[49]

When Adams entered his study in Braintree to draw up a constitution he faced an awesome responsibility. Successive Massachusetts legislatures had dithered and delayed facing this challenge for two years following the British evacuation in March 1776, before the lawmakers made the mistake of drafting a document themselves, which the voters rejected decisively. In 1779, as the state's citizens elected a convention devoted solely to drafting a constitution, both political needs and political expectations were high. Massachusetts faced the pressing challenge of sustaining a war that continued to consume its resources and generate a staggering burden of debt. In the six weeks available to him, John Adams had to produce a frame of government that would work effectively in war and peace, dressed in language that his countrymen would respect and understand.

To this daunting task, however, Adams brought a unique set of qualifications. His formal education, legal training, and years of highly disciplined self-study in both legal and political history, culminating in an extensive knowledge of the republican tradition of early modern Europe, were second to that of no man in America. His service in Congress from 1774 to 1777 was equally impressive. What most distinguished John Adams from his leading contemporaries in Massachusetts, however, was not the learning and experience he enjoyed, but an

important experience he lacked. Among men of comparable rank and length of service, he alone had been absent from Massachusetts for nearly the entire period from the First Continental Congress to the summer of 1779. During these five years he had served only briefly—for a month in August 1775, and another month in December 1775–January 1776—on the new provincial Council, and he had never exercised the office of chief justice of the Superior Court, to which he was appointed in 1775.[50]

John Adams's nearly total absence from the political scene in Massachusetts since 1774, and his slight involvement, a single legislative term, in provincial government during the previous decade, must have deprived him of a certain practical knowledge of politics that many other local leaders possessed. But it also gave him a rare objectivity. As he drafted the text that would become the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, he was not defending either a past or present political career, or the reputation of the state's legislature, which the state's voters, who had recently rejected the Constitution of 1778, could well imagine that document's authors doing. Nor was Adams preparing the ground for his political future. He would never hold political office in Massachusetts again, and he never expressed the slightest desire to do so, even to his most intimate correspondents. In his temperament, constitutional knowledge, and the expanding arc of his public career, most of it spent outside Massachusetts, John Adams was an exemplary eighteenth-century analogy of Solon, Athens's sixth-century BCE lawgiver, the venerable leader who was called to devise a new plan of government for his countrymen and then retired from public life to allow them to govern themselves under that plan.[51]

The student of John Adams's constitutional labors in 1779 encounters just the evidentiary void that the ancient lawgiver tradition encouraged. Adams left no outlines, drafts, or notes of any kind—and almost no correspondence—that might reveal how he composed the long, detailed constitution that he presented to Samuel Adams and James Bowdoin, and then to the full drafting committee, before it became the printed *Report of a Constitution or Form of Government for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts*, which was distributed to every member of the convention on 1 November. One cannot prove that Adams generated any outlines, drafts, or notes as he worked, but the length, complexity, and intricate architecture of the finished document make their existence, at least for a time, a virtual certainty.[52]

The fact that no such materials have ever been discovered in the papers of a man, and a family, that obsessively kept every scrap of writing, including thousands of documents of far less historical value, strongly argues that when John Adams completed his text, he promptly destroyed every last sheet of study materials. To do so was in keeping with the ancient teaching that a lawgiver should present his work as a whole, to be accepted, rejected, or amended by those who received it as they chose, without interrogating the lawgiver. Adams was

thoroughly familiar with the legendary achievements of the ancient lawgivers; in the closing paragraph of *Thoughts on Government*, he explicitly saw himself and his Revolutionary colleagues as heirs to that tradition. The act of destroying his drafting materials would help save him from irritating and possibly embarrassing questions about the source, meaning, or intent of any part of his handiwork. When his career took an unexpected turn in the fall of 1779, his sudden departure for his second diplomatic assignment Europe, in mid-November, even more effectively protected him from constitutional inquiries by his countrymen for over eight years.[53]

Yet if one cannot know how Adams worked in his small study, there is little mystery about his immediate political influences, his larger political objectives, or the structural and literary sources of his final text. In preparing the new constitution, he did enjoy the advantages of having been largely absent from the daily scene of politics for nearly five years and of having no local political ambitions. His objectivity, however, was relative, not absolute. John Adams held strong opinions about Massachusetts government, Massachusetts politics, and Massachusetts politicians in 1779, just as he had in 1776, and in virtually every other year back at least to 1763. He had a fairly small circle of political friends, notably Samuel Adams, James Bowdoin, James Warren, and his old teacher, Professor John Winthrop, and a few colleagues whom he did not admire, especially John Hancock and Robert Treat Paine. None of these leaders had either risen or fallen in Adams's estimation since Independence. Most of his friends were still politically active in the state, and several hoped to remain active. Bowdoin, Warren, and Samuel Adams were right at hand if he wished to consult them, they probably briefed him on recent Massachusetts politics, and they may have sought to persuade him of their views on particular constitutional issues.[54]

More important than any current personal influences on John Adams, however, was the fact that most of the political ideas and constitutional principles that he held in 1779 were those he had held or developed some five, ten, or even fifteen years before. Only his larger conception of the most effective relationship between executive authority, aristocratic power, and popular freedom had recently begun to change, and would continue to change for several more years. In September 1779, John Adams, the principal draftsman of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, could be said to have had a personal agenda that was neither so parochial as that of a local politician nor quite so universal as that of a political philosopher.

Adams's broadest objective was to create a government that would be a secure center of a stable political system that could both preserve Massachusetts's strongest cultural traditions and face the challenges confronting a newly independent political entity in a larger political confederation, as well as in a national and international economy. To achieve this, he incorporated four major princi-

ples in his final draft. The first was a commitment to a comprehensive set of inviolable rights possessed by all the citizens of Massachusetts, rights that it was the duty of the state's new government to protect. The second was the supremacy of the law over the interests of any individual men, or groups of men, who either held public office or sought to influence those who did. The third was a robust balance between the three major institutions of government: a bicameral legislature, which was itself internally balanced in two distinctive legislative chambers; a strong, single chief executive, who also possessed legislative powers; and a secure, independent judiciary. Adams's final principle was a commitment to education and the furthering of public knowledge as the primary means of creating and maintaining the well-informed citizenry that alone could understand and defend the new political order.

In constructing his long and detailed draft of a new constitution, Adams called on four principal sources. First was the Massachusetts Bay Charter of 1629, which was in effect until 1686. The second and most important source for the new constitution's Frame of Government was Massachusetts's royal charter of 1691, which retained some of the structure of the 1629 charter. This constitution was in effect until its sudden alteration by the Massachusetts Government Act in 1774; reinstated in 1775 by the Revolutionary legislature, it was in full effect as Adams began to write. His third source, for a few details of the constitution's Frame, was the rejected Constitution of 1778. Finally, Adams drew on several other American and English sources, and in particular from the bills of rights that preceded the 1776 constitutions of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware.[55]

Had he made his draft a mere cut-and-paste job, however, Adams might have reminded the voters of the poorly designed, poorly written Constitution of 1778, which they had soundly repudiated. He employed two strategies to make his text different from that of 1778, and from every prior American constitution. To place the often rather dry but essential mechanics of a constitution in an appealing and even inspiring rhetorical setting, he quoted, paraphrased, or broadly summarized, in his draft's Preamble, and in crucial clauses in its Declaration of Rights and Frame of Government, from three other sources: the literature of the Puritan political covenant that was familiar to most citizens of Massachusetts from a long series of election-day sermons; the republican writings of James Harrington and John Locke; and his own writings, especially his *Letters of Novanglus* and *Thoughts on Government* for his constitution's structure and general purpose, and his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* for its appeal to public education and the advancement of knowledge as the foundation of any free government. He would unveil his second, more innovative strategy in his Frame of Government.[56]

First, however, one must consider Adams's title: "A Constitution or Form of Government for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts." The substitution of

"Commonwealth" for "State" in Revolutionary America was not original to John Adams or to Massachusetts. Virginia first employed "Commonwealth" in its 1776 constitution, and Adams promptly endorsed the term and hoped Massachusetts would adopt it. But "Commonwealth" had a particular resonance in Massachusetts. The Puritan "Commonwealth of England" that overthrew and replaced Charles I was still dear to the historical memory of many New Englanders. For Adams, the term was doubly precious, a vivid reminder of one of his favorite political works, James Harrington's *Commonwealth of Oceana*. Nor was he alone in this admiration. In early November, during the convention debates over Adams's draft, an unnamed delegate—not John Adams—proposed that Massachusetts change its name to the Commonwealth of Oceana.[57]

Some attention, too, must be paid to the difference in meaning between "state," employed in the titles of forty-six American states, and "commonwealth," used in just four. The word state may mean nothing more than an independent or autonomous political entity, with no implication of a particular form or purpose of its government. A commonwealth, however, is a polity that exists for the common welfare, the "common weal," of all its people. It need not be a democracy, perhaps not even a republic, but it must, at a minimum, be a government "for the people." Adams could, of course, have used the word while ignoring its larger meaning, but he did not. Both the constitution's Preamble and its Declaration of Rights, as well as important passages in its Frame of Government, establish beyond doubt that "commonwealth," however many constitutional scholars may simply equate it with "state," meant much more to John Adams, and to many of his neighbors.[58]

Adams's brief Preamble was a carefully crafted appeal to his countrymen's sense of a constitution's proper purpose. Its first paragraph set forth a Lockean vision of a government freely chosen by the people; its second directly related Massachusetts's Puritan covenant to that larger republican tradition.

> The end of the institution, maintenance and administration of government, is to secure the existence of the body-politic; to protect it; and to furnish the individuals who compose it, with the power of enjoying, in safety and tranquility, their natural rights, and the blessings of life: And whenever these great objects are not obtained, the people have a right to alter the government, and to take measures necessary for their safety, happiness and prosperity.
>
> The body politic is formed by a voluntary association of individuals: It is a social compact, by which the whole people covenants with each citizen, and each citizen with the whole people, that all shall be governed by certain laws for the common good. It is the duty of the people, therefore, in framing a Constitution of Government, to provide for an equitable mode of making laws, as well as for an impartial interpretation; and a faithful execution of them, that every man may, at all times, find his security in them.[59]

The Preamble's closing paragraph skillfully wrapped a specific statement of the convention's purpose around an appeal to divine providence that expressed both Massachusetts's seventeenth-century religious heritage and its eighteenth-century Enlightenment understanding of that heritage:

> We, therefore, the delegates of the people of Massachusetts, in general Convention assembled, for the express and sole purpose of framing a Constitution or Form of Government, to be laid before our Constituents, according to their instructions, acknowledging, with grateful hearts, the goodness of the Great Legislator of the Universe, in affording to this people, in the course of His providence, an opportunity of entering into an original, explicit, and solemn compact with each other, deliberately and peaceably, without fraud, violence, or surprise; . . . and devoutly imploring His direction in a design so interesting to them and their posterity, DO, by virtue of the authority vested in us, by our constituents, agree upon the following *Declaration of Rights, and Frame of Government*, as the CONSTITUTION of the COMMONWEALTH of MASSACHUSETTS.[60]

One popular objection to the Constitution of 1778 had been its lack of a bill of rights, and John Adams was happy to correct this defect. His Declaration of Rights, which immediately followed the Preamble, was not so carefully constructed as the Frame of Government that followed it, but it was comprehensive and effective. With one exception—to the only article not written by John Adams—it was well received by Massachusetts voters. Its thirty-one articles set out both the broad principles of individual rights that every inhabitant of the Commonwealth would possess and exacting standards of performance for several vital functions of the new government. Adams's Declaration was not as elegant or concise as the federal Bill of Rights of 1789, but it contained nearly all the substance of those celebrated amendments.[61]

Yet the Declaration of Rights was the least original part of Adams's constitution. Of its thirty-one articles, twenty-eight were drawn from England's most revered legal pronouncements, particularly Magna Carta (1215) and the Bill of Rights (1689), and from the bills of rights of Virginia, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland, all written in 1776. More occasional sources were England's Petition of Right (1628), John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* (1690), and America's Declaration of Independence. The two most important American sources were Pennsylvania's bill of rights, which Adams greatly admired, despite his disapproval of that state's unicameral government, and Maryland's bill of rights.[62]

The most original part of the Declaration, which owed nothing to other states or to England, was its controversial third article. John Adams had rejected Calvinism in his youth and was probably not an orthodox Christian in the sense of believing in the divinity of Christ. His belief in a Supreme Being, however,

was firm, and he strongly supported organized religion as a powerful tool of social control. This allowed him in Article II, which followed a similar article in Maryland's bill of rights, to declare: "It is the duty of all men in society, publicly, and at stated seasons, to worship the SUPREME BEING, the great creator and preserver of the universe. And no subject shall be hurt, molested, or restrained, in his person, liberty, or estate, for worshipping GOD in the manner most agreeable to the dictates of his own conscience; or for his religious profession or sentiments; provided he doth not disturb the public peace, or obstruct others in their religious worship."[63]

But John Adams also believed that many Massachusetts voters would demand more than an official exhortation to worship God. They would insist on preserving the existing establishment of religion by laws compelling the inhabitants of each town to pay for the support of local ministers, as the colony and province had done since its founding. Adams's own belief in religious liberty, however, and his premonition that any formula for church establishment would be controversial, made him so uncomfortable that he passed the composition of Article III to another author, perhaps to his cousin and fellow drafting committee member, Samuel Adams, who was a more orthodox Christian. Article III allowed each taxpayer to designate a minister who would receive his required support, but only if there were a "teacher or teachers [i.e., ministers] of his own religious denomination" in his town; "otherwise it may be paid to the teacher or teachers of the parish or precinct where he usually resides." This choice was simply not available to dissenters from the dominant Congregational denomination in the scores of towns that had no other organized church.[64]

Ironically, given John Adams's decision to entrust the issue of church establishment to a colleague who could address it with greater conviction, Article III was by far the most unpopular part of the Massachusetts's Constitution of 1780. When the finished document was presented to the people in the spring, that article failed to secure the approval of two-thirds of the voters, as required by the ratification process. But the convention, through some technical maneuvering in its counting of the ratification vote, managed to retain it. Had the Declaration of Rights let the matter of religion rest with Article II, Massachusetts could have ended its religious establishment a half century earlier than it did.[65]

In the committee *Report*'s Frame of Government, John Adams unveiled his most creative strategy for setting his constitution apart from all others. Every American charter or constitution that preceded it had set out its various articles, sections, or clauses in an unbroken list, often with little conscious attempt to group like material together, a deficiency shared by his own Declaration of Rights. But Adams's took the word "Frame" seriously and created an architectural structure whose logic would be evident to even the most casual reader. Introduced under the heading, "Chapter II" (having headed the Declaration of Rights "Chapter I"), "The Frame of Government" briefly stated Adams's larger

constitutional objective before turning to three titled sections. Each numbered "Section," like each "Chapter," was centered on the page, usually with a brief title stating its subject. "Section I," which lacked such a title, introduced a bicameral legislature; "Section II" discussed the "Senate"; and Section III described the "House of Representatives." The Frame, somewhat confusingly, then proceeded to "Chapter III. Executive Power," with separate sections on a governor, a lieutenant governor, a governor's council, and a handful of other executive officers, and to "Chapter IV. Judiciary Power." Three additional chapters, each devoted to the particular duties of the whole government rather than to its distinct branches, completed the text. Adams's execution of the structure of his Frame was not perfect, but it was sufficiently articulate for the plenary convention to perfect it by changing, inserting, or relabeling a few chapter, section, and title headings, with little rearrangement of the material below them.[66]

Immediately following the title "The Frame of Government," Adams placed a restatement, drawn from his Preamble, of the people's agreement "to form themselves into a free, sovereign, and independent body-politic or state, by the name of THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS." He then declared, in what became his constitution's most celebrated passage, his largest objective as a lawgiver: "In the government of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the legislative, executive, and judicial power, shall be placed in separate departments, to the end that it might be a government of laws and not of men." This sentence's concluding clause is the most direct connection, in the entire *Report*, to the republican tradition that John Adams had discovered for himself, in gradual stages and with increasing confidence and self-awareness, between the Stamp Act crisis and the Coercive Acts, and had expounded to the people of Massachusetts in his *Letters of Novanglus* in 1775, and then to all the rebelling colonies in *Thoughts on Government* in 1776. In his first use of "a government of laws and not of men" in Novanglus's letter VII, he had helpfully supplied the statement's intellectual genealogy, from "Aristotle, Livy, and Harrington." And, indeed, Aristotle was the first writer to express this concept in recognizable form, and James Harrington made it a central principle of his *Commonwealth of Oceana*.[67]

But the sentence's first clause—"In the government of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the legislative, executive, and judicial power, shall be placed in separate departments"—deserves its own consideration for quite different reasons. First, as suggested earlier in this chapter, the separation of powers was no more an absolute for John Adams than certain other important structural principles of republican government. Just as the constitutional "checks" in "checks and balances" could not be absolute if a government were to function at all, and "balances" could never be perfect in any government, so the separation of powers must somehow be achieved in a manner that left the distinct branches of government with effective ways of both communicating with and influencing

one another. Adams understood this essential qualification of any principle of constitutional architecture, and his draft would provide ample opportunities for the separate branches of government to work harmoniously together for the public good.[68]

In the case of the legislative power, however, John Adams was willing to qualify the operation of the separation of powers far more than most of his Revolutionary colleagues. In the *Report*, Section I, which immediately follows "a government of laws and not of men," begins: "Art. I. The department of legislation shall be formed by two branches, a *Senate* and *House of Representatives*, each of which shall have a negative on the other." This article is the one place in the entire *Report* where John Adams was probably compelled by the drafting committee, against his own judgment, to alter his ideal plan of republican government. He briefly spelled out his disappointment in a letter to Elbridge Gerry, written just one week after the committee submitted the *Report* to the convention: "I am clear for Three Branches, in the Legislature, and the Committee have reported as much, tho awkwardly expressed. I have considered this Question in every Light in which my Understanding is capable of placing it, and my Opinion is decided in favour of Three branches."[69]

The issue here was not whether Massachusetts's governor would be granted an absolute veto over bills passed by the legislature, because the third sentence of this same Article I states: "And the first magistrate shall have a negative upon all the laws—that he may have power to preserve the independence of the executive and judicial departments." The full convention would reduce this power by replacing it with a suspensive veto, a recent innovation in 1779, but now familiar to Americans from its use in both their federal and state constitutions. This device allowed the legislature to override the governor's veto by a two-thirds vote in each house. Some decades later Adams, who had never accepted the wisdom of this change, misremembered it as the work of the drafting committee. Yet even in its restricted form, this veto afforded the governor of Massachusetts a more effective check on the legislature than any other chief executive in America enjoyed in 1780.[70]

Returning to the work of the drafting committee, one may suggest with some confidence that the opening sentence of Section I, Article I, as John Adams initially framed it, read (here set in italics, as a conjectured text): "*The department of legislation shall be formed by three branches, a Senate, a House of Representatives, and a Governor, each of which shall have a negative upon the others*."[71] Since the committee did in fact approve the full veto power that Adams requested for the chief magistrate, why was he unhappy about a mere textual alteration? In the spring of 1776 he had written to Massachusetts friends that he did not believe that New Englanders would accept the strong single executive he had just recommended in *Thoughts on Government*, although he hoped the southern colonies would take his advice. And from 1776 through 1778, he had

never insisted that Massachusetts create a strong single executive. Yet in 1779, he wanted both a full armory of powers for the governor, including an absolute veto, and a formal recognition that the chief executive was an equal branch of a tripartite legislature.

Adams's conjectural original wording of the opening of Section I, Article I, as hypothesized here, was, to be sure, consistent with all his writings on government since his "Clarendon" essays on 1766. But his sudden zeal for the maximum authority *and the maximum honor and respect* for the executive, after some three years of emotional disengagement over the issue, must have had some cause that is worthy of investigation. The concluding clause of Article I states the formal grounds for granting the governor an absolute veto, so "that he may have power to preserve the independence of the executive and judicial departments." But it is in his letter to Gerry, immediately after declaring his commitment to "three Branches," that Adams supplies the deeper reason for his passion: "In such a State as this, . . . We will never have any Stability, Dignity, Decision, or Liberty, without [a three-branch legislature]. We have so many Men of Wealth, of ambitious Spirits, of Intrigue, of Luxury and Corruption, that incessant Factions will disturb our Peace, without it. And indeed there is too much reason to fear with it. The Executive, which ought to be the Reservoir of Wisdom, as the Legislature is of Liberty, without this Weapon of Defense will be run down like a Hare before the Hunters."[72]

In 1779, as never before in his life, John Adams voiced an intense fear of political faction. But this was neither the generalized fear of political discord nor the fear of the masses expressed by so many leaders of the American Revolution. This was a fear of "Men of Wealth, of ambitious Spirits, of Intrigue, of Luxury and Corruption"; in short, this was a fear of aristocracy. In 1779, Adams expressed this fear in just a few letters to close friends, but within a decade it would become the central anxiety of his political philosophy. The reasons for its sudden appearance in the fall of 1779, however, are crucial to understanding the changes in John Adams's political thought over the next decade. The following chapter will trace the development of Adams's fear of aristocracy and explore his initial attempts to deal with it.

Most of the substance of Adams's Frame of Government following these revealing opening passages developed in a straightforward manner. The Frame's arrangement of the branches and powers of government, with a bicameral legislature, the strongest governor of any American state, and a separate and well-defended judiciary, probably did not depart greatly from plans that might have been independently proposed, in John Adams's absence, by Theophilus Parsons, the author of the "Essex Result," or by James Bowdoin or James Warren. And, indeed, any or all of these men, and perhaps several others, may have spoken directly to John Adams to press their views of a proper constitution before he sat down to write. But it is even more probable that virtually every structural clause

in the Frame, with the major exception of its favoring a two-branch over a three-branch legislative power, was Adams's own. The plan of government that he presented was essentially that which he had proposed and defended since the summer and fall of 1775, first in Congress and then in *Thoughts on Government*, well before Parsons, Bowdoin, or Warren had set forth their views on the matter.[73]

Yet in 1779, John Adams incorporated in his Frame several novel provisions that show his determination to produce a government that would control both faction and aristocracy. He began by placing the description of his Senate (Chapter II, Section II) before that of his House of Representatives. This arrangement was exceptional among early American constitutions, and it broke with the Massachusetts Charter of 1691, under which the towns elected members to the House, who then joined the outgoing members of the Council to select a new Council. The Frame's reordering of the two branches might have been a mere accident, but this appears inconsistent with the statement that "[t]he Senate shall be the first branch of the legislature" (Section II, Article II).[74] The reordering could have been suggested by other drafting committee members, but this could be said of nearly any section in the *Report*; there is no evidence that points to this feature of the Frame as more likely than any other to be of non-Adams authorship. Finally, the new arrangement fits well with John Adams's developing ideas about aristocracy in a republic, not because he felt more respect for aristocracy than for the people—as his Democratic-Republican critics would mistakenly come to believe in the 1790s—but because he was coming to see the control of aristocracy as the central problem in constructing a republican government.

Even more important than the Senate's position in the Frame was the set of constitutional mechanisms that made that body distinct from the House. For this, Adams had ample precedent in the Charter of 1691. That document provided for the direct election of representatives by the qualified voters in each town, but for the appointment of councilors by the whole legislature, according to a plan under which the councilors represented four large, historically based districts of most unequal size and population. Adams's Senate was only a little larger than the old Council, but it was of a decidedly more republican character. The senators, like the representatives, would now be elected directly by qualified voters, and they would represent thirteen districts, essentially the Commonwealth's counties. The electoral franchise for both the House and the Senate, and for the governor as well, was the same. But senators had to possess an estate valued at three hundred pounds, three times the qualification of representatives, and five times that of the voters. Moreover, the awarding of seats to these county districts, in contrast to the town districts represented in the House, was proportional not to their population but to "the public taxes paid by the said districts." That is to say, and as the convention's March 1780 letter that introduced the new

constitution to the voters said explicitly: "The House of Representatives is intended as the Representatives of the Persons, and the Senate of the property of the Common Wealth."[75]

In this way, Adams made his Senate a more elite body, at least in law, than the old Council, which had no property qualifications for service, although most of its members were relatively affluent. Then, too, one must consider the simple matter of size. The new House was designed much like the House provided in the Charter of 1691, but because the Frame granted larger towns additional representatives, on a sliding scale tied to their population, the chamber was now, at least potentially, very large. Yet the new Senate, to which voters would elect forty members, would upon the opening of each annual session diminish to thirty-one—just three more than the old Council's twenty-eight—after nine of its members were elevated to the new Governor's Council.[76]

The electorate that would choose the Commonwealth's representatives, senators, and governor was not so highly restricted as the pool of candidates for those offices, but by the standards of the Revolutionary era, John Adams did not provide even a moderately democratic franchise. The single property requirement, "a freehold estate . . . of the annual income of three pounds, or other estate real or personal or mixt of the value of sixty pounds," was 50 percent higher than the traditional English forty-shilling (two-pound) freehold that Massachusetts had employed for elections to the House since 1691. The repudiated Constitution of 1778 had proposed the same franchise for electing the governor and senators, but set no property requirement for electing members to the House. The new franchise was nearly at the opposite end of the Revolutionary-era scale from that of Pennsylvania, whose Constitution of 1776 allowed all freemen who served in the army or militia, or who paid any taxes, to vote in all elections, irrespective of their property holdings. What is remarkable about Adams's proposed franchise is the fact that the *Report*, in accordance with a clause in the referendum on calling a constitutional convention that the legislature had presented to Massachusetts voters in the spring of 1779, was proposing a constitution that all freemen who had reached twenty-one years of age, regardless of property, would be asked to approve or reject when the convention completed its labors. Just as remarkably, they did ultimately approve it.[77]

The most distinctive branch of the Frame of Government was, appropriately for a John Adams creation, its executive. The text of "Chapter III," on "Executive Power," quite exceptionally for a Revolutionary-era state constitution, was nearly as long and complex as that devoted to its legislature. Adams designed his executive to be a potent counterweight to that legislature through a host of powers and provisions, but three stand out. First, of course, was the governor's absolute veto, which Adams had placed at the beginning of the Frame's legislative provisions in accordance with his belief—which the committee did not allow him to articulate—that the executive was also part of the legislative

power. The second was the governor himself. This grand magistrate, elected annually not by the legislature, as in most other American states, but by the entire voting population, was granted many powers and clearly marked off from all other officeholders by the highest property requirement for any state official, a freehold estate worth one thousand pounds. Adams's most original device to ensure that the executive could hold its own against the legislature, however, was a new Governor's Council, which, unlike the old Council, had no share in legislation, but possessed substantial executive powers.[78]

If one simply compared the structure of government in the Massachusetts Charter of 1691 with the Frame of Government in the committee *Report*, one might conclude that John Adams was so tightly bound to tradition that he simply could not let go of the Council. He knew he had to create an elected upper legislative house; the people of Massachusetts were demanding it, even more insistently in the conservative, mercantile east than the rural, radical west, where many voters favored a unicameral legislature. Yet he was personally committed to the survival of a more elite Council, chosen by the legislature, not by the people. He therefore stipulated the popular election of a Senate, from which nine members would be chosen by the full legislature to serve on a new Governor's Council. If there were no testimony on this point from his pen after 1779, this would be a perfectly plausible explanation of this unusual feature of his constitution.[79]

In the late 1780s, however, certain political events brought Adams, now a busy diplomat in Britain, back to a consideration of constitutional powers, and he began to explore and explain in greater detail what he thought of aristocracies, senates, councils, and executive power. Part of what he said then applied directly to the new federal Constitution, but these later thoughts also illuminate his motives for designing Massachusetts's Frame of Government in such a distinctive fashion. By the fall of 1779, as he explained to Elbridge Gerry, Adams saw the control of aristocracies, especially the new aristocracies of wealth, as the fundamental challenge facing republican governments. The solution, as he explained in the 1787, was to bring these aristocracies into government and give them their particular home—the Senate—with important legislative powers, while denying them any share in executive decisions, as he wished the Philadelphia Convention had done in constructing the United States Constitution.[80]

In Massachusetts, Adams chose to do this by creating an entirely new Governor's Council. Unlike the old Council, this body would have no legislative powers, but it would wield extensive executive power by exercising the exclusive right to approve or reject the governor's appointments of nearly all civil, military, and judicial officials. Moreover, this new Council would be quite small. What Adams hoped to do was to confine an aristocratic Senate to the legislative sphere of action by taking away its right to approve gubernatorial appointments, while giving the governor a small body of men who would work closely with

him and would be more inclined to give their support to him than to the legislature. Remarkably, this quite novel solution to a problem that Adams saw so clearly, and that many of his countrymen never did see at all, was accepted by the full convention and approved by the people. And following its transformation into an elected body in the nineteenth century, the Governor's Council survives—somewhat controversially—to the present day.[81]

The Frame of Government's "Chapter IV. Judiciary Power," the briefest in the entire plan, was of great personal importance to John Adams. Ever since his series of essays "On the Independence of the Judges" in 1773, he had argued forcefully, in letters to friends in Massachusetts and in *Thoughts on Government*, for an independent judiciary. In 1776 several states incorporated this principle into their new constitutions. In his Chapter IV, Adams granted the state's highest judges the grand title, the Supreme Judicial Court. He also guaranteed the independence of all judges by providing that they would "hold their offices during good behavior," but he prohibited them from sitting in the legislature, which the 1691 Charter had permitted. And in an unusual provision, he opened up one avenue of a direct contact between the judicial power and both the executive and the legislative power by allowing both the governor and Council, and the Senate, "to require the opinions of the judges on important questions of law." Of all John Adams's constitutional achievements, the independence of the judiciary has proved one of the most durable and most admirable, particularly in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which has for over two centuries resisted the democratic innovation, so seductively appealing to the voters in the majority of American states, of allowing the popular election of judges.[82]

The last substantive section of the Frame of Government was the one in which John Adams took the greatest pride: "Chapter VI, Section II, The Encouragement of Literature, &c." As this one long, unbroken, and somewhat awkward periodic sentence ties together so much of what John Adams was about, as an author, a thinker, a constitution maker, and a citizen, it is worth quoting in its entirety:

> Wisdom, and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people, being necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties; and as these depend in spreading the opportunities and advantages of education in the various parts of the country, and among the different orders of the people, it shall be the duty of legislators and magistrates, in all future periods of this Commonwealth, to cherish the interests of literature and the sciences, and all seminaries of them; especially the university at Cambridge, public schools, and grammar schools in the towns; to encourage private societies and public institutions, rewards and immunities, for the promotion of agriculture, arts, sciences, commerce, trades, manufactures, and a natural history of the country; to countenance and inculcate the principles of humanity and general

> benevolence, public and private charity, industry and frugality, honesty and punctuality in their dealings, sincerity, good humour, and all social affections, and generous sentiments among the people.[83]

In October 1779, John Adams restated his youthful vision from that same month, twenty-four years before, when in the closing paragraph of his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* he had exhorted his countrymen:

> Let the public disputations become researches into the grounds and nature and ends of government, and the means of preserving the good and demolishing the evil. Let the dialogues and all the exercises, become the instruments of impressing on the tender mind, and of spreading and distributing, far and wide, the ideas of right and the sensations of freedom.
>
> In a word, let every sluice of knowledge be open'd and set a flowing.[84]

A Report of a Constitution or Form of Government for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was vigorously debated clause by clause, and was amended in many details, large and small, by the full convention between November 1779 and March 1780, before the finished constitution was presented for approval or rejection to the broadest electorate, up to that date, in Massachusetts history. Many passages in the *Report* were sharply criticized in the convention, just as many articles in the finished constitution drew heavy criticism from the people. But on balance, John Adams's Frame of Government survived relatively intact. Two of the convention's most important alterations to his plan diminished the powers of the governor—its substitution of a veto subject to a two-thirds override by the legislature for his absolute veto; and the election of officers by militia members in place of his gubernatorial appointment—and Adams disapproved both changes until his death.[85]

But the legislative Senate, executive Governor's Council, independent judiciary, and property qualifications for officials and voters all survived with minimal modifications. For John Adams, the most important survival was his governor, who, even without an absolute veto, became the strongest chief executive in any American state. This was the vital center of Adams's constitutional thought from his first speech on the subject in Congress in October 1775 until the *Report*'s presentation to the Massachusetts Convention in November 1779. Two weeks later Adams set off for Europe with several copies of the *Report*. Upon his arrival in Paris in February 1780, he directed copies to printers for publication in France and England, and as soon as he received the finished constitution in August 1780, he arranged for its publication as well.[86]

The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, which the convention declared ratified in June, went into effect in October of that year. It generally pleased Massachusetts's eastern counties, especially its mercantile community. The third article of its Declaration of Rights, not written by John Adams, naturally

displeased many Baptists and other dissenters from the state's Congregational establishment. And Adams's Senate and governor were generally unpopular in central and western Massachusetts. Yet Adams's architectural creation proved remarkably durable in his native state and was highly influential in the constitution-making process of several other states, and at the national level, in the decade following its ratification. The document as a whole, although amended over a hundred times, has never been replaced, and is now the oldest functioning written constitution in the world.[87]

5. The Triumph of Adams's Vision of Executive Authority

In more than two centuries since its individual drafting, collective revision, and popular ratification, the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 has been both widely praised and roundly criticized. The praise, beginning immediately and rising steadily over time, has highlighted the process of the document's creation as the most perfect expression of America's state constitution making, and as the most important precedent for the creation of the United States Constitution. Criticism of the Massachusetts constitution reached its peak within its author's lifetime and focused on just those features of the document, its Senate and powerful governor, in which he was most heavily invested, but severe strictures on his handiwork have steadily given way to a deeper appreciation since the mid-nineteenth century. The converging course of these initially divergent streams of public opinion has swung decisively in John Adams's favor with a force that is seldom appreciated, even in his native Commonwealth.

The process that created the Massachusetts constitution—electing a special constitutional convention and presenting the product of its deliberations for popular approval—was soon recognized as the perfect expression of the constituent power of the American people. In preparing a new constitution in 1784, the first adopted after the War for Independence, New Hampshire closely followed Massachusetts's lead. The national movement that produced the federal Constitution adopted a similar procedure in 1787–88, but with state legislatures as electors of delegates to the Philadelphia Convention, and state conventions entrusted with ratifying the final document. In 1790 in Pennsylvania, the same process produced a new constitution that followed the general form of Massachusetts's document in place of the unicameral Constitution of 1776.

The public celebration of America's distinctive way of making governments began almost immediately, in Philadelphia's grand July 4, 1788, parade of the many economic and social groups that looked forward to living under the new federal Constitution. Tributes in print began even earlier, in dozens of pamphlets that accompanied struggles over revisions of state constitutions in the 1780s, in John Adams's *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States* in 1787–88, and in the *Federalist* essays and other nationalist literature that accompanied the ratification of the federal Constitution. These encomiums

have continued, usually focused on that national creation, but with ample praise for the parallel tradition of state constitution making, to the present day, in thousands of high school and college textbooks. More sophisticated academic studies, examining every twist and turn, every article and clause, of the Revolutionary era's constitutional achievement, have been a prominent feature of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American political thought; they reached a kind of apotheosis in Gordon Wood's magisterial *Creation of the American Republic*.

Both the initiation and approval of state constitutions, however, owed considerably less to John Adams than did the architecture of those documents. He was absent in France during both the first and last stages of this process in Massachusetts and never had a hand in calling a separate constitutional convention or in submitting the final document for popular approval. This last refinement in constitution making has been Massachusetts's—not John Adams's—uncontested contribution to republican theory and practice in America.

The content of the Massachusetts constitution was another matter; criticism of the text began immediately. In the 1780 ratification returns, the continued establishment of the Congregational church in Article III of the Declaration of Rights, the property qualification for voting, the religious qualification for holding office, and the very existence of the Senate and the governor in the Frame of Government drew protests from towns all over the Commonwealth. Yet only Article III of the Declaration, and an article providing for the document's amendment that was added to the Frame by the convention, evidently failed to secure the required approval of two-thirds of the voters, failures that the convention ignored.[88]

The sharpest early challenge to the constitution, however, was the massive protest movement, soon known as Shays's Rebellion, which swept through central and western Massachusetts in 1786–87. Caused by a collision of rural debt and sharply increased state taxation, the rebellion gave rise to cries for the abolition of the Senate and the governor as expensive, useless, and oppressive institutions. But the state government survived through a combination of violent suppression of the rebels by the militia, the return to the governorship of the widely popular John Hancock, and a restructuring of the tax burden by the next legislature in response to the economic crisis. Counterbalancing this early criticism of the Frame of Government was the influence of its structure on the constitutions of New Hampshire and Pennsylvania and, ultimately, of nearly every American state. Adams's striking visual execution of his plan, with related articles grouped into chapters and sections, was equally popular in other states and, most immediately, at the Philadelphia Convention in 1787.[89]

In the era of the early republic, the Massachusetts constitution still faced considerable opposition at home, but an opportunity to amend it by convention in 1795 was declined by the voters. By 1820 the sentiment for change had grown stronger; a convention held that year, which John Adams attended, produced

nine important amendments that the voters approved. In the 1830s and 1840s the legislature proposed four more successful amendments. By the 1850s, however, these changes had failed to calm partisan struggles over the constitution. Massachusetts's Democratic Party wished to make sweeping reforms; its Whigs resisted. The Democrats secured a convention in 1853, but could not persuade the voters to approve that body's proposed alterations to the constitution. Succeeding legislatures, however, recognized the need to make basic changes in their government, and in the seven years before the Civil War they proposed a dozen amendments that received popular approval. Collectively, the twenty-five amendments approved between 1821 and 1860 effected major structural improvements in the Constitution of 1780. Since 1860, however, although far more amendments have been approved by the voters, they have made only slight alterations to John Adams's essential fabric of government.[90]

This essential durability has had two expressions. First, while nearly every American state of late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century origin has replaced its initial constitution at least once in the nineteenth or the early twentieth century, Massachusetts has ultimately rejected every call to repudiate the Constitution of 1780. Second, the important changes that the Commonwealth has made in the document, and many are quite significant, have principally affected the definition of the electorate, the qualifications of officeholders, and the scope of what its government can properly do, both by denying it one old power—to enforce the support of religion—that was once accepted as the duty of government and by approving many new powers to cope with new economic and social challenges. These major changes have included the expansion of the electorate (1821, 1881, 1891, 1924), disestablishing religion (1833), ending property qualifications for representatives and senators (1840) and for the governor (1892), longer terms for legislators (1918) and for the governor (1918, 1964), and expanded powers for the legislature (1821, and several twentieth-century amendments), for the governor (1821, 1836, 1907), and for the judiciary (1964). The one basic power acquired by the people has been that classic Progressive Era reform, the right of popular initiative and referendum (1918). The most important structural reform has concerned the Governor's Council.[91]

What has endured has been far more impressive. Massachusetts has strengthened its bicameral legislature by several amendments that eventually reduced the House to manageable size (1836, 1840, 1857, and 1974); that restored to the Senate the nine seats originally lost to the Council (1840); that granted to the House the right, extended in the original Constitution of 1780 to the governor and Council, and to the Senate, to request a legal opinion from the Supreme Judicial Court (1964); and that opened up many new areas of legislative activity. The governor has lost the right to appoint several executive and local officers who are now elected (1855) but has gained the power to appoint and remove other officers (1821, 1860, 1907). And the Governor's Council, through its direct

election by the people (1855), became fully independent of the legislature. Finally, the judicial branch so dear to John Adams has lost not a shred of its independence or power in over two centuries.[92]

From John Adams's perspective, the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 should have been as nearly perfect a triumph as one can expect in public life. But it was characteristic of him to complain, both in private and in print, about just two flaws, the convention's rejection of his draft's grant of two powers to the governor: to cast an absolute veto, and to appoint militia officers. The first deficiency bothered him deeply to the end of his life. Over the course of several years of study and writing, he had become almost obsessed with the conviction that the chief magistrate must be an integral *and acknowledged* part of the legislative power. But no majority of Americans in the Revolutionary era, in any state, was willing to allow a continuation of this shadow of monarchy to intrude on their bright new republican future.[93]

Yet if one looks to substances rather than labels, one can see that Massachusetts's new governor was potentially a powerful player in the legislative process. And since the mid-nineteenth century, as all American governments have grown larger and more complex, both the president of the United States and the governors of most states, including Massachusetts, have ceased to be merely *pro forma* participants in the legislative process; each has now an integral part in the performance of that central act of government. Once again, as so often before in his political career, John Adams's understanding of the effective functioning of government has proved to be remarkably prescient. In the 1780s his concept of the powerful executive struck many of his countrymen, who had just cast off the yoke of the British Crown, as an offensive anachronism. Little did they, or indeed Adams himself, suspect that it was an anachronism simply because its time had not yet come.

John Adams had traveled a long road, with several twists and turns, since he first expressed his constitutional convictions in the fall of 1775 on the floor of the Continental Congress. At that season, he almost despaired that Americans would accept either a bicameral legislature or an independent chief magistrate in their new governments. As he penned *Thoughts on Government* in the spring of 1776, he did believe that the southern and middle colonies would be more willing than his native New England to draft new constitutions that provided some executive authority. But as the challenge of facing Britain's powerful army and navy became clearer each year from 1776 into the 1780s, he was gratified to see his vision of a sound republic gaining adherents in nearly every state.

Adams's Massachusetts neighbors were the last to commit to a new plan of government, and for some three years Adams himself, thoroughly distracted by his congressional and diplomatic duties, seemed curiously detached from their faltering efforts to create a stronger government. But in 1779, both Massachusetts and John Adams had a stroke of good fortune. Returning home unexpect-

edly from Europe, Adams was ready to transform some two decades of legal, political, and constitutional wisdom into his ideal republic. In his *Report of a Constitution*, he came as close to achieving this goal as any man could reasonably hope to do. By creating a constitution that established a balance between legislative, executive, and judicial powers and that elevated executive authority to an astonishing degree for a people who had just rejected the rule of an imperial monarch, Adams established the strongest and most durable foundation of any government in Revolutionary America. As he set sail in November 1779 for his second mission to Europe, he could be forgiven for imagining that his constitutional labors, as thinker and writer, were finally at an end. But as so often before in his life, John Adams was in for another surprise.

VII

An Education in American Aristocracy

1775–1783

> Thus much I can say with perfect sincerity, that I have found nothing to disgust me, disconcert me, or in any manner disturb me, in the French Nation. My Evils here arise altogether from Americans.
>
> *To Abigail Adams, 9 February 1779*

In *Thoughts on Government*, as in the congressional debates that preceded it, John Adams argued for a bicameral legislature because he feared that Americans, disgusted with royal governors, would ensure that any new executives they created would be too weak to exercise real authority. Without an upper house, this lack of a strong executive would place virtually all political power in each state in a single institution, its popularly elected assembly. But in light of what he soon came to believe, Adams's apparent assumption in 1776 that upper legislative chambers would restrict themselves to moderating those assemblies or to effectively mediating between assemblies and executives shows how slow he was to appreciate both the power and the menace of aristocratic forces in republican governments. In his early explorations of political architecture, both in Massachusetts and in Congress, Adams, like most of his countrymen before Independence, acknowledged the abuse of executive power but paid little attention to differences that might arise between the upper and lower legislative houses of Massachusetts or any other colony.[1]

As the growing rebellion against Britain disrupted old trade patterns, created sizable armies that required substantial supplies and a fleet of privateers that secured many of those supplies and other treasure, and unleashed floods of paper money to facilitate the vastly expanded activity of government at every level, most Americans encountered a mixture of new economic opportunities in supplying their soldiers and sailors and unprecedented economic sacrifices to pay for them. A few Americans, however, enjoyed a commercial bonanza of heretofore unimagined proportions. As these new men aggressively sought and

ostentatiously displayed their new wealth, John Adams began to look critically at the economic and political structure of American society in a way that he had never looked at the provincial society in which he had grown to maturity and begun his legal career. This led him to reassess and ultimately to redefine aristocracy, first in Massachusetts and then across America.

The transformation in John Adams's thoughts about and feelings toward aristocrats and aristocracy passed through three broad, overlapping stages. In the first, privately in his diary—and later in his autobiographical memory—he easily accepted and quietly endorsed the local aristocracies he found in Braintree and Boston before the outbreak of armed rebellion in 1775. The second stage saw his occasional but passionate condemnation, in a few private letters, of avaricious men who, he believed, were taking undue advantage of the economic opportunities unleashed by the Revolution. This more critical attitude toward the wealthy and the powerful was evident by the time he wrote a new constitution for Massachusetts in 1779 but still confined to his diary and private correspondence. The third, more public stage of his evolving views on aristocracy developed during his diplomatic service in Europe, but its roots lay almost entirely in his experience with Americans. These views found their first full expression in his *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*, published in 1787–88. Thereafter they were rarely absent from his major writings.[2]

In the course of tracking these changes in Adams's thought, one must ask two questions. First, when and why did Adams develop a profound fear of the political role of aristocracy in a republic? Second, how did he define aristocracy in America's new republican culture? To answer these questions, however, one must first ponder two others. First, how should one characterize the role of aristocracy in British North America before the American Revolution? Second, what were John Adams's views of aristocracy in his native province as he grew to maturity and then as he began to develop his legal career and first considered holding public office?

1. Aristocracy in Early America

The word *aristocracy*, as a label both for a species or style of government and for a major social component of government, is inherently more relative, and whatever reality lies behind it more elusive, than the labels for other types of government in the Western political tradition. Monarchy is unambiguously rule by one person, at least in political and legal theory. Oligarchy is rule by a few, although the numerical limits of that few may vary substantially from one theorist or observer to another. Oligarchy's traditional opposite, democracy, rule by the people, is a more relative label for a government because "the people" is a most imprecise term, and arguments over the degree to which the people, however defined, can or do actually rule themselves, either directly or indirectly, and assessments of the various means by which they have sought to do so over some

twenty-five centuries, quite properly fill libraries of learned analysis and often contentious debate. But democracy, like oligarchy, is fundamentally a quantitative concept.

Aristocracy, however, for John Adams and for most political theorists and historians writing before the advent of modern theories and techniques of social science, began not with a quantity, however elastic, but with a putative quality. It was literally rule by the "best" men, although in both theory and practice the criteria for these best rulers have included everything from personal wealth (fluid capital) to landed wealth, membership in a distinguished family, prominence in a dominant social or religious group within the larger society, a military reputation, a refined education, or a materially or aesthetically impressive lifestyle. To all these John Adams would eventually add yet more qualities. The relative proportions of these elements in any particular aristocracy varied widely from one society to another; and this variation gave each of the distinct aristocracies encountered in Britain's North American colonies its own character, with no two colonies having aristocracies that were exactly alike.

As important as the qualitative ingredients that have determined the character of aristocracies, however, has been one quantitative factor, the wide variance in their size, both in absolute terms and relative to the societies they dominated or sought to dominate. These differences of scale are of the first importance in understanding John Adams's uses of aristocracy in different contexts, over a political and intellectual career of some six decades. In his youth, he first encountered the tiny aristocracy of Braintree; in the 1760s, he became intimately familiar with the larger aristocracy of Massachusetts; and, in the course of his extensive reading in British history and law, he became better informed about the multilayered, highly visible aristocracy of Great Britain. Finally, in the 1780s, while thinking and writing about aristocracies in a variety of European republics over some two millennia, Adams became increasingly concerned to understand American aristocracy, whose very existence most of his countrymen denied.

Consider the implications of this matter of scale in determining who was, and who was not, a member of a particular aristocracy in a particular time and place. Deacon John Adams of Braintree, a farmer in summer and a shoemaker in winter, who never owned more than two hundred acres of rural land, projects a solidly middle-class image to the modern observer, as he would have to most eighteenth-century British Americans. In Braintree, however, Adams was a third-generation town selectman, a church deacon, and a captain in the militia. This placed him just at the edge of his town's local aristocracy. Yet, from the perspective of thousands of the more-established farmers throughout Massachusetts, Deacon Adams's life was largely indistinguishable from their own, and they had not the slightest awareness that he existed. Some of them might have heard or read of the prosperous tavern keeper Ebenezer Thayer of Brain-

tree, because he sat in the provincial assembly. This placed Thayer above Deacon Adams, securely in Braintree's small aristocracy, but still outside the provincial aristocracy. To enter that more select group, he would have needed to attain the sort of position held by members of Braintree's leading family, the Quincys: justice of the Superior Court, Speaker of the House of Representatives, or member of the Governor's Council. Had any one of these Quincys moved to Britain, however, and put a sizable portion of his wealth into a country estate, he would have become a mere country gentleman. If he could secure election to the House of Commons, he could move to the edge of Britain's aristocracy, but again he would not have been quite in it. For that, he would have needed a leadership position in the Commons, a knighthood, or, at the farthest reach of the imagination, a title of nobility. If one considers how each of these Braintree men—an Adams, a Thayer, or a Quincy—lived in the three settings projected here, and compares their lifestyles and social behavior with that of men and families above them, their relationship to the social structure of these respective aristocracies becomes starkly visible.[3]

These observations on the relative, elusive character of aristocracy may help to clarify the different ways in which John Adams used this word, and viewed the reality behind it, over time. But this study's strict adherence to the word itself in discussing Adams's political thought deserves a brief comment. Over the past several decades it has become customary in historical analysis, in both Britain and America, to employ the French word *élite* to designate a political, economic, or social group that is or was in some way raised above the general populace of its larger society. There is the strong implication, embedded in the word's origin, that elites have been at least unconsciously—and often quite consciously—selected by that larger society for their elevated station, an implication that is less evident in the much longer history of the word aristocracy. At the very least, historians who use the newer word apparently believe that the elevated status of elites is widely accepted by their societies, except during periods of revolutionary change.[4]

Beyond these basic differences between the terms elite and aristocracy, there are two valid reasons for following Adams's terminology rather than that of modern social analysis. The first is the essential nature of the present work. This is fundamentally an appraisal of John Adams's ideas about the proper character and role of republican government in America from the 1760s to the 1820s; it is not an exploration of the character of republican governments that actually developed in America in those same decades. The second reason is related to the first. John Adams, unlike most of his contemporaries, stated quite explicitly what he thought an aristocracy was, and in the course of defining the term, he consciously expanded its meaning, adapted it to an American setting, and thereby created a newly conceived aristocracy that was quite unrecognizable to his countrymen. Aristocracy was not merely a term of political analysis for

John Adams, readily interchangeable with the more modern word elite. It was a coherent subject in itself, and as his political ideas developed, the proper role of aristocracy in public life became a central theme of his republican vision.

Aristocracies were an essential element in the government of virtually every European monarchy, including Great Britain. But as John Adams well knew, they had played just as prominent a role in republican governments from the ancient Greek city-states to the Italian, Swiss, and Dutch republics of the early modern era. Their elevated position was often explicitly recognized in republican rhetoric, they were formally incorporated into many republican constitutions, and in the eighteenth century they thoroughly dominated the larger, more commercial republics, including Venice and several provinces in the Netherlands. Even in the most democratic republics, beginning with ancient Athens, men who were by any measure aristocrats—wealthier from birth, more educated, and more leisured than their neighbors—but who were accorded little or no formal acknowledgment of their economic or social superiority in their republic's laws, became powerful political figures. The only republics in which aristocrats did not play a major role in government were quite small and almost entirely agricultural.[5]

In British North America, however, aristocracy, whether as a social or a political reality, was often more problematical than it had been in Britain and Europe. Many of the English—and Scottish, Irish, Dutch, French, German, and Swedish—settlers of North America felt conflicting social impulses. They had come to the New World to escape the economic, cultural, and religious domination of established aristocracies in their native lands. Once settled in America, however, these immigrants often succumbed to the temptation to become new aristocrats, usually by engrossing large tracts of land or developing mercantile fortunes, but also, as in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, by securing secular leadership positions in each colony's dominant religious sect. With their economic and social domination came political power, which in several colonies became firmly entrenched in relatively small clusters of the settlers' most successful sons and grandsons over the course of the eighteenth century.[6]

This process of fleeing old aristocracies only to create new ones was everywhere noticed by the larger settler population and their descendants, and it was often resented, particularly when a few men or families secured a large share of the political power and economic rewards at the disposal of royal and proprietary governors. Until the eve of the Revolution, however, America's nascent aristocracies held their ground, and even made gains, in a larger British world in which aristocratic privilege was utterly natural. But in the imperial crisis of the 1760s and 1770s, as a result of both their own behavior and the behavior and ideology of those who sought greater political autonomy for the colonies, America's established aristocracies, always pale imitations of their British models, suddenly experienced a weakening of their position.

Many colonists who had aristocratic aspirations or were already regarded as aristocrats by their neighbors never opposed the American Revolution. In a few of the oldest colonies with relatively strong local governments and culturally homogeneous white populations, most notably Massachusetts and Virginia, several of the wealthiest and most distinguished figures promptly took leadership positions in the new Revolutionary governments. Even before the forces of rebellion had spread very widely, however, many of America's aristocrats responded to popular protests against British policies by clinging more tightly to one of their primary sources of power, the royal and proprietary governments that the rebels opposed. This eventually placed them, first as Tories, and then as Loyalists, in the position of enemies of their country.[7]

As the rebellion spread, the thousands of new men of more modest backgrounds who moved into the radical committees, the expanding militia, and the radicalized legislative assemblies quickly lost whatever respect they once had for their betters. In their eyes, too many of these "betters" had become disloyal to America, or possessed no obvious superiority over the rising new political class, or were simply in the way. They were blocking both the larger community's desire for political autonomy and the aggressive Revolutionaries' ambitions for their own public careers. Finally, the new Revolutionary ideology, even from the pens of the more moderate Revolutionaries, including John Adams before America's Independence, provided no real place for aristocracy. Discussions of the power and authority that should be accorded to executives and to both upper and lower legislative houses initially proceeded with little apparent attention either to the economic and social differences that might arise between the leaders who would fill these institutions or to the conflicts that could emerge between the various political constituencies that might support them.

As late as the beginning of April 1776, in drafting his *Thoughts on Government*, Adams himself seemed relatively unaware of the rapid new development of an increasingly critical attitude toward all aristocracies among his countrymen. His advocacy of an upper legislative house, and of a strong executive, was expressed in language that treated all Americans equally. Even his private writings show almost no apprehension that a republic might experience controversies that were based on divisions of economic and social class among the people. By the time he suddenly became alert to this possibility, in April and May 1776, America was already moving toward a total rejection of aristocracy as utterly incompatible with a republican form of government, and with American society.[8]

For John Adams, however, the issue was more complex. Rather than fade into memory or disappear down the corridors of denial, as it would do in the minds of many Americans over the next decade, the reality of American aristocracy, and the danger that it posed to America's new republics, became more evident to Adams with each passing year. The origins both of his initial unconscious acceptance of aristocracy and then of his growing concern over its

political role lay in the political culture in which he grew to maturity, a culture that was seriously disrupted by the Revolutionary movement and the War for Independence.

After a journey across some two decades of reading, thinking, and writing, set forth in half a dozen chapters in John Adams's rich intellectual and political life, it is time to revisit our hero's place and family of birth, and of his youth and early career. The first place to seek an understanding of Adams's concept of aristocracy is the town of Braintree. If the cliché that "All politics is local" has any validity, it is equally true of aristocracy. Adams acknowledged this in an often-quoted passage from the first volume of his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*: "Go into every village in New England, and you will find that the office of justice of the peace, and even the place of representative, which has ever depended only on the freest election of the people, have generally descended, from generation to generation, in three or four families at most."[9]

Not every New England town had clearly recognizable first families, but most of the older and larger towns did, and among these was Braintree. John Adams grew up close to this local aristocracy but not in it. His native town's oldest and most populous district, the North Parish, where the Adamses had resided for more than a century, had just one first family, the Quincys. The Middle Parish also had one first family, the Thayers. The Quincys were pre-eminent in their hometown and well known and respected throughout the province; the Thayers were only locally prominent. In Braintree, as in nearly every New England town of any size, however, the structure of political and social power was more complex than just two or three distinguished families sitting atop an undifferentiated mass. To exercise power in their towns, leading local families needed local allies, families of more modest means and repute who would support their position, help fill up town offices, and perhaps even provide a few marriage partners, if their own ambitions were not too grand to permit such alliances.[10]

The relationship between the Quincy and Adams families over the course of a century before the Revolution effectively illustrates the dynamics of this structure of authority. Both families had arrived from England in the 1630s, the first decade of Puritan settlement of Massachusetts Bay. From the outset the Quincys were the more affluent family; they quickly claimed sizable tracts of good farmland in Braintree, and some family members lived for long periods in Boston, where they became prominent merchants. The Adamses had more modest resources, but they settled in Braintree's small commercial center and became both well-established farmers and moderately prosperous maltsters and brewers. As some of their sons and daughters spread out to neighboring towns, one son named John Adams, like some of the Quincys, moved to Boston, where his grandson, our John Adams's second cousin, became the patriot Samuel Adams.[11]

In Braintree, both Quincys and Adamses joined the local First Church and took prominent parts in town government. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Quincys had divided into three branches, headed by two brothers and their first cousin. One or another Quincy nearly always served as one of the town's five selectmen, and a Quincy was usually colonel of the local militia. At the provincial level, one Quincy became a justice of the Superior Court; another was Speaker of the provincial assembly. The more modest Adamses, for their part, steadily supplied Braintree with a second selectman: first, John's English-born great-grandfather, Joseph (1626–94); next, his grandfather, Joseph (1654–1737); and then his father, Deacon John Adams (1692–1761). The deacon also served as captain of the militia. Throughout this period, the Adamses were loyal allies of the Quincys, whom they accepted as their social superiors.[12]

John Adams's early career in Braintree closely followed his family's path into public life, but with a vital difference. As a college graduate who showed early promise as a lawyer, he could relate to the Quincys in a different manner from that of his father or grandfather. In 1759 he briefly courted Colonel Josiah Quincy's daughter Hannah, evidently without any opposition from the colonel, who admired the young attorney's abilities, and in 1764 he married Abigail Smith, a granddaughter of John Quincy, the eldest member of the family and former Speaker of the House of Representatives. John also took on town offices immediately after his father's death, serving as a selectman, the fourth generation in his family to do so, from 1766 to 1768, when he moved to Boston. His only political disappointment was his defeat by Ebenezer Thayer in 1766, for Braintree's seat in the provincial assembly. Had John Adams decided to forgo an affluent legal practice in Boston to remain in Braintree after 1768, he might well have achieved, almost entirely through local activity, a considerably higher political and social position than his father, both as a Quincy relation by marriage and, eventually, as a legislator or local judge. He would still not have been the political or social equal of a Quincy, but he would have been more in the local aristocracy of Braintree than out of it.[13]

John Adams's introduction to the larger provincial aristocracy, however, did not begin with his 1768 relocation to Boston but preceded it by almost two decades. The most effective initial gateway to a prominent career in Massachusetts, whether in the ministry, the law, or even, to a lesser extent, in trade, was a Harvard education (which virtually every Quincy son received, from the 1690s to the Revolution). John Adams used his years at Harvard (1751–55) to establish close relationships with many of his classmates, several of whom were from families more affluent or distinguished than his own. His second gateway into Massachusetts's aristocracy was the professional endorsement of Jeremiah Gridley, considered the dean of the Boston bar. Gridley evidently extended his patronage to the young attorney simply in recognition of his intellectual promise, but in doing so, he was not being exceptionally altruistic. Patronage—the

essential price of deference for any man seeking to establish or maintain an elevated position in eighteenth-century Britain or British North America—was a core function of aristocratic behavior.[14]

John Adams, in the two decades prior to American Independence, paid due deference to his well-connected classmates and to his province's legal and political superiors, in return for the friendship, good opinion, and active support that helped launch and maintain his career. His professional rewards came quickly. He moved rapidly up the ranks of Boston's small legal community: taking on larger caseloads, being recognized during the Stamp Act crisis as a leading barrister, securing a seat in the assembly in a 1770 by-election, winning fame in the Boston Massacre trials, and in the winter of 1773 crossing intellectual swords with two of the grandest figures in the province, General William Brattle and Governor Thomas Hutchinson. By the 1770s, John Adams had become the leading member of the Massachusetts bar, known personally to every judge of the Superior Court, to the leaders of the House of Representatives, and to several members of the Governor's Council. In May 1773, the legislature first nominated Adams for a seat on the Council (which Governor Hutchinson disallowed). Had the Revolution not intervened, he would still have achieved—indeed, he had already achieved—a higher social standing than any of his Adams ancestors.[15]

And John Adams deeply respected Massachusetts's aristocracy, however much he disliked some of its members who clustered around Governor Hutchinson. In the 1760s and early 1770s, this loose amalgam of powerful and distinguished men had four principal components: several still prominent descendants of seventeenth-century Puritan and Pilgrim first families, both the affluent (such as the Quincys, and the Warrens of Plymouth) and those of more modest means (like Adams's friend Jonathan Sewall, who married a Quincy); the old legal aristocracy (second-generation Superior Court judges Benjamin Lynde and William Cushing); a newer aristocracy of wealth (like Thomas Hancock and his nephew and heir, John); and the new aristocracy of royal officials appointed by Governors Bernard and Hutchinson. Until the Stamp Act, John Adams was on good terms with all of these men. The most impressive testimony of his deep love for his province and his enthusiastic acceptance of its political leadership, its social order, and its moral values is his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law*, published in 1765.[16]

After the Stamp Act crisis, Adams found it more difficult to relate to several royal officials whom he knew well; eventually even his close friendship with Jonathan Sewall, who was both advocate general of the Admiralty court and attorney general of the province, was irreparably damaged by the imperial crisis. But he remained on good terms with several old families, many new merchants, several judges, and many members of both the Council and the House. And at least until Lexington and Concord, and in many Massachusetts towns

for several years thereafter, scores of local aristocracies seemed quite unaffected by the collapse of royal authority. The provincial aristocracy, too, endured for some time relatively intact. In sharp contrast to the experience of several other colonies and new states during the American Revolution, the leadership of Massachusetts's political and economic worlds included many of the same men before and after 1776, notably Councilor James Bowdoin, Speakers of the House Thomas Cushing and James Warren, and the merchant prince John Hancock. Beneath this remarkably stable surface, however, the character of Massachusetts politics was beginning to change. In the spring of 1776, John Adams first sensed a challenge from below, in the rising political consciousness of "the people." By the spring of 1777, he began to take alarm at new economic and political forces toward the other end of the social scale, forces that he saw rising up in Massachusetts and across America.[17]

2. The Rise of America's New Aristocracy

The fundamental changes in government and society brought on by the American Revolution only gradually came to John Adams's attention. From June 1775 into April 1776 he became acutely aware of the demand in several colonies that the structure of their governments be altered to diminish the power of the executive, to elevate the power of the legislature, and, in many instances, to vest all legislative powers in a single legislative chamber. Adams vigorously opposed each of these demands in Congress and finally resigned himself to the anonymous publication of his letter to Congressman George Wythe, under the title *Thoughts on Government*, to demonstrate the folly of making such alterations in the architecture of America's colonial governments as they moved toward Independence. But this controversy occurred largely within established political circles; in most of the rebelling colonies, calls for reform in 1775–76 came from sitting legislators and congressmen. As Carl Becker might have expressed it, the early debates about new provincial and state constitutions concerned the nature and prospects of "home rule" by the colonies' traditional governing classes, not the more unsettling question of who should rule at home.[18]

But in mid-April 1776, just as he was completing *Thoughts on Government*, a challenge to the political legitimacy of existing colonial governments, and of the Continental Congress, reached Adams from an unexpected quarter, his wife. In her most famous letter, Abigail Adams urged John and his congressional colleagues, in any "New Code of Laws" they might draft for the newly independent nation, to "Remember the Ladies." If the legitimate interests of women were not recognized, she continued, "we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice." Abigail's letter is rightly celebrated as the most eloquent early plea for the rights of women in America, particularly their rights within marriage. It is seldom considered for another distinguishing virtue, its challenge to the restricted concept of "the

people"—the constituent power that legitimated every free government—to which virtually all American congressmen subscribed in 1776.[19]

Bemused by Abigail's temerity, John Adams responded on 14 April, in a humorous vein. But in attempting to make light of Abigail's heartfelt objection to patriarchal authority, John fell into a thicket of assumptions about the identity of "the people" in Revolutionary America, assumptions that would soon move to the forefront of the nation's political discourse, to be challenged in several discrete stages over the next two centuries. "As to your extraordinary Code of Laws, I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government every where. That Children and Apprentices were disobedient—that schools and Colledges were grown turbulent—that Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their Masters. But your Letter was the first Intimation that another Tribe more numerous and powerfull than all the rest were grown discontented."[20]

Just what John Adams had heard about unruly children and apprentices, turbulent students, disrespectful Indians, and insolent African slaves, and where he had heard it, is not known. But despite its levity and evident good humor, his letter suggests that he was quite aware of large portions of the American populace who were never asked their opinion on political candidates, public policies, or new constitutions, even in the midst of a revolution.[21] He would not be asked again about the rights of these utterly disfranchised Americans. But less than a month later, the Massachusetts legislator and judge James Sullivan wrote to Congressman Elbridge Gerry to seek his advice on whether the new state that was replacing the existing province should extend the right to vote to men who had no property. In passionate rhetoric, but without a clear plan, Sullivan strongly favored this extension—in effect, universal manhood suffrage—but only in combination with another law that would give those in possession of property their own distinct power at the polls. Sullivan's argument may indicate an early support in Massachusetts for a dual basis of representation. John Adams would later implement this idea, in a quite modest manner, in the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, by tying the allocation of seats in the Senate, but not in the House of Representatives, to the taxes paid by each electoral district.[22]

Gerry showed Sullivan's letter to Adams, who used the occasion of responding, on 26 May 1776, to letters that he had just received from Sullivan to set out his ideas on the franchise in more detail than he had ever done before. At this point, he was deeply skeptical of establishing two franchises, one based on property, the other on universal manhood suffrage, but he devoted most of his text to attacking the latter proposal. The foundation of a sound republic, he argued, was an electorate whose members could exercise independent judgment. It was this principle, he believed, that properly excluded from voting all women, all

young men under the age of twenty-one, and all adult men who lacked sufficient property to make them independent of more affluent men who would otherwise control their votes. In a central passage, he connected this principle to his favorite political theorist:

> Harrington has Shewn that Power always follows Property. This I believe to be as infallible a Maxim, in Politicks, as, that Action and Re-action are equal, in Mechanicks. Nay I believe We may advance one Step farther and affirm that the Ballance of Power in a Society, accompanies the Ballance of Property in Land. The only possible Way then of preserving the Ballance of Power on the side of equal Liberty and public Virtue, is to make the Acquisition of Land easy to every Member of Society: to make a Division of Land into Small Quantities, So that the Multitude may be possessed of landed Estates. If the Multitude is possessed of the Ballance of real Estate, the Multitude will have the Ballance of Power, and in that Case the Multitude will take Care of the Liberty, Virtue, and Interest of the Multitude in all Acts of Government.[23]

In 1776, John Adams accepted Massachusetts's existing hierarchical political and social order, while resisting any measure, like basing the franchise on different levels of property ownership, that might make it even more hierarchical. He was content with the character and degree of aristocratic articulation that Massachusetts had experienced for decades and saw no reason to believe that aristocracy in his native state was becoming a greater challenge to the principles of republican government than it had previously been. At the same time, he acknowledged the political benefit of making Massachusetts, and every American republic, politically more egalitarian, if a way could be found to distribute landed property more widely.

But the alteration in Revolutionary American society that most powerfully engaged John Adams's attention was happening at the opposite end of the economic scale from the concerns of women, servants, Indians, African slaves, and poor white men. This was the rise of a new, enlarged, aggressive aristocracy of wealth, which appears to have taken Adams as much by surprise as Abigail's "Remember the Ladies" letter but made a much deeper impression on him. His extant writings do not reveal just when or how he first became aware of this new aristocracy. In his correspondence with Massachusetts friends in 1775 and 1776, he had only briefly discussed the form of government that established leaders of the province and then the new state planned or hoped to construct, with occasional cautions against civil discord, but no identification of those who might be discordant.

But on 27 April 1777, without any prior warning, Adams voiced his dismay at America's new aristocracy in a letter to Samuel Freeman, the Speaker pro tem of the Massachusetts House of Representatives:

> I wish you Success, equal to your Desires, in establishing an happy Form of Government. But the Rage of Speculation and the Flames of Passion have Spread so far, in our State, that I am not without my Fears that you will be too much divided in sentiment to erect a very vigorous Government. Our State abounds with ambitious Men, in such Numbers, and with avaritious ones, who are still worse, and with others in whom both Passions unite, in a great degree, who are the most dangerous of all, that I fear our Government, will be turbulent, our Laws unstable, and consequently our Exertions too languid.[24]

The impassioned last sentence of this passage closely resembles the language in Adams's letter to Elbridge Gerry of 4 November 1779, written just after he had drafted the *Report of a Constitution* for the Massachusetts Convention. It is also the first recorded expression of Adams's alarm at ambitious, avaricious speculators, an alarm he would not express again until his letter to Gerry. But the circumstances of the two letters were most dissimilar. His reply to Gerry's letter of 12 October 1779 was a direct response to Gerry's question about Adams's (accurately) rumored support for an executive with legislative powers, and Adams leveled his criticism at ambitious men as a justification for his constitutional position. But in 1777 he was replying to a very different letter from Freeman, with whom he had not previously corresponded, and may never have met. Freeman's letter of 25 March 1777 closed with the briefest mention of the assembly's upcoming consideration of "the expediency of entering on measures for forming a New Constitution." Almost its entire text was devoted to establishing effective postal service between Maine and Boston, which Adams quickly passed over as out of his area of expertise. He then turned to the impediment that Massachusetts's "ambitious Men," whom Freemen had not mentioned, would make to any effective constitution.[25]

It is not known just when or how John Adams learned of Massachusetts's new, threatening aristocracy of wealth, or why he suddenly, and without evident provocation, spoke out against it to Samuel Freeman. His other Massachusetts correspondents, notably the perennially dissatisfied James Warren, had given him no more than the vaguest of hints of such an unfavorable development. But a likely source of Adams's knowledge of these new men of wealth, and his dark concerns about their influence, was his work as president of Congress's Board of War. In his letter to Freeman, Adams specifically condemned "the Rage of Speculation." A large portion of that malady arose from the provisioning of the Continental army and the impact of that provisioning on price inflation and the proliferation of Continental currency. This growing problem would have come to Adams's attention almost daily as he wrestled with the economic difficulties facing the new nation's armed forces.

However Adams learned of the new aristocracy of wealth in Massachusetts and throughout the new nation, its origins are clear enough. The Revolution

began to disrupt the established economic and social order in Massachusetts as soon as Britain closed the Port of Boston in June 1774. Much of the commercial activity in Boston, the province's leading port, either moved to Salem, Newburyport, and other seaports or simply ceased. This immediately diminished many fortunes, large and small, and soon increased many others. The political order was at first less affected in Massachusetts than in several other colonies, but when the province rose in armed rebellion in April 1775, some level of economic and political disruption spread to virtually every community and moved south all the way to Georgia. Congress's creation of the Continental army in June 1775 and its authorization of the issuing of letters of marque to privateers in the spring of 1776 accelerated the spread of hardship and sacrifice, but also of adventure and opportunity.

The British army's withdrawal from Boston in March 1776 started the city on a slow path to recovery, but it did not diminish the economic impact of the war on the newly independent state. Massachusetts supplied a greater number of soldiers to the Continental army than any other state, and its privateers were active throughout the War for Independence. The hardship and sacrifice of military service and taxes continued into the 1780s, but so did new economic opportunities. And with new opportunities in rapidly changing times came the growing fortunes of ambitious men, fortunes sometimes built on new trading routes out of Salem or Marblehead, but just as often on financing privateers for a chance at unheard of profits, or on speculation in grain and other military supplies, all fueling and fueled by an explosion in paper currency. The principal beneficiaries of the new economy often looked ambitious and even avaricious to the general public; and by the standards of economic behavior that prevailed before the war, many undoubtedly were. Moreover, several of the newly wealthy quickly sought political office or tried to influence those who held office. John Adams had been somewhat slow to see these men; he first acknowledged them in his letter to Freeman, two full years after Lexington and Concord had opened the floodgates of economic opportunity. When he did finally see them, he immediately concluded that their ambitions would make the establishment of any sound new constitution in Massachusetts, based on an impartial appraisal of the public interest, nearly impossible.

For John Adams, the Revolution and its attendant War for Independence were absolutely necessary. The alternative for Americans, surrendering their autonomy to the British Crown, would have been unthinkable; in his own words of June 1774, "Death in any Form is less terrible."[26] But there was a heavy cost to independence that neither Adams nor many of his countrymen had foreseen. New England's traditional social order, which he had been raised to respect by his revered father, which he had entered with keen aspirations for his own advancement, both at college and as a young lawyer, and in which he had carved out a place, with his voice and his pen, as a rising new aristocrat by 1770, was

permanently altered by the War for Independence. As a reward for his widely respected labors in Congress, his own political and social position continued to advance after 1774, well beyond any expectations he could have had in 1770. But by 1777, Adams was finally beginning to appreciate the full force of the Revolutionary disruption of Massachusetts's social structure, and this realization powerfully affected the way he looked at the politics of his newly independent state, and of his new nation. His first effective response to Massachusetts's new aristocracy was his creation of an executive of exceptional power in his *Report of a Constitution for . . . Massachusetts* in 1779. But an unexpected turn in his career would determine that he would not let the issue rest there. In a new venue, Adams would have more to learn about America's new aristocracy, and more to say about it.

3. John Adams's European Conversion: The Received Tradition

Any discussion of John Adams's concept of aristocracy must eventually confront the charge that he sailed to Europe in 1778 bearing the sound republican ideals of a patriotic American and returned a decade later with a deep admiration for both aristocracy and monarchy, an admiration learned at the luxurious, corrupt royal courts of France and Britain. So few scholars of the Revolutionary era have seriously questioned this thesis that it has become a kind of received wisdom, as much a part of Adams's image as his hot temper and his portly physique. And it is a venerable tradition. A handful of Adams's contemporaries first took note of his undeniable fascination with monarchy and aristocracy in the late 1780s; partisan newspaper editors tied him to Europe's hierarchical culture in the 1790s; and in 1805, Mercy Otis Warren, in her *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, formally indicted her former friend of succumbing to the pomp and glitter of Versailles and St. James's Palace.[27]

Most biographers of John Adams have picked up this theme and uncritically recorded his fascination with aristocracy as an essential element of his personality; virtually none have attempted to trace that fascination to any source in his life or career outside his European mission. A few political scientists have gone further, tying his writings directly to uniquely European political traditions and thereby helping to shape the vivid characterization of Adams's political thought in the single most important study of Revolutionary America's constitutional achievement, Gordon Wood's *Creation of the American Republic*.[28]

The accusation that John Adams, a sound republican in 1776, became both a monarchist and an admirer of aristocracy in a decade of high living abroad should appear improbable to anyone familiar with his fairly modest lifestyle or his circle of bourgeois friends and acquaintances while he was in Europe. That such a charge has stuck to Adams, but never to Thomas Jefferson, who lived much higher in Paris, and on a more elevated social plane, also appears, at first glance, rather puzzling. Yet despite the reservations of a few recent scholars who

have thoroughly studied both his life and his extensive and complex literary legacy, the image of Adams's surrender to the pride and pleasures of the Old World has enjoyed an evident plausibility for over two centuries.[29]

Three factors have fed John Adams's reputation as an admirer of both monarchy and aristocracy. First, his public writings contained little about monarchy, and virtually nothing about aristocracy, before he went to Europe, but afforded ample discussions of both subjects from 1787, when the first volume of his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States* appeared in London, until his last theoretical and polemical work, produced during his long retirement. His spirited but relatively brief arguments for a legislative role for a strong single executive in America's new state governments, made before the greater part of his service in Europe, passed largely unnoticed by early readers of his *Thoughts on Government* (1776), or were moderated in committee in his draft of the Massachusetts Constitution (1779). His only recorded concern over the threat posed by aristocracy to republican government prior to his first departure for Europe, in his letter to Samuel Freeman in 1777 (quoted in the preceding section), did not appear in print until the 1980s. Even the best-read Adams scholars could be forgiven for believing that Europe was indeed a watershed between the early, republican John Adams and the Federalist Duke of Braintree.[30]

A second pillar in the edifice of John Adams as monarchist and aristocrat was his own behavior after his return to America. In 1789, from his chair as president of the new federal Senate, Vice President Adams urged the creation of a grand official title for the President of the United States. As a federal officeholder in New York and Philadelphia, Adams would also, on occasion, ride in a fine coach and wear a sword, which he had never done before going to Europe, but had occasionally done there. And his anonymous but widely known authorship of the *Discourses on Davila* (1790–91) was taken as further proof of his monarchist sympathies.[31]

Finally, for the entire period of his federal service (1789–1801), Adams was more isolated from other public officials, from representatives and senators, and even, while president, from the members of his own cabinet than he had ever been from other congressmen in the 1770s.This isolation was at least partly involuntary, and it caused Adams some distress. As president of the Senate, the only office that he was obligated to fill as vice president, he was confined to a highly restricted formal role that denied to him what he most wanted, the right to engage freely in debate on the major issues facing the young republic and to offer his younger colleagues the wisdom of his experience. His relationship with President Washington was also formal and distant, both the product of a complex set of reactions by each man to the other and an unforeseen effect of the hastily thought out office of vice president, which would not be given an important role to play in the executive branch of the federal government until the late twentieth century. When Adams finally became president, his wife Abigail's

chronic illnesses and his profound differences over foreign policy with most members of Congress, particularly New England's Federalists, deepened his isolation, which was, in the last analysis, a continuation of the almost solitary nature of most of his public service since he became America's sole peace negotiator in 1779. All this contributed to Adams's aloof, pompous, almost haughty public image. The open, skilled counselor to Massachusetts legislators and the lively, engaged colleague to members of Congress in the 1770s was but a distant memory.[32]

Taken together, this testimony of an apparent alteration in his political beliefs and behavior powerfully support the image of a John Adams forever changed—and, for most Americans, changed for the worse—by his European experience. And something essential did change in John Adams's life during his years in France, Holland, and Britain. To understand this change, however, one must look carefully at what he did in Europe, and what happened to him there. Such an assessment was quite beyond Adams's countrymen, who could only read his formal accounts of his diplomatic activities and his late public defense of his service. To master that material alone was a daunting challenge. Adams was the most frequent and voluminous correspondent to Congress of any diplomat of the Revolutionary era; he produced a long and vivid account, from a decidedly personal perspective, of the negotiations that led to the Treaty of Paris; and in retirement he wrote scores of letters defending his career for local publication. But hundreds of more revealing private letters, including dozens of the highest value addressed to Abigail Adams, and both his intimate diary and his candid autobiography remained tucked away in trunks and boxes in the Adams family home in Quincy until the 1840s and 1850s—or, in many instances, until the twentieth century. A reappraisal of John Adams's European decade, which the totality of this evidence now makes possible, and without which a fuller understanding of the development of his political thought is impossible, is the subject of the remainder of this chapter and of the chapter that follows.[33]

4. Adams in Europe: An Alternative Reading

On several occasions, quite unpredictable events powerfully shaped the course of John Adams's public service. The first of these was his election to the Continental Congress in June 1774, which launched his national career. The second was his appointment by Congress, in November 1777, to replace Silas Deane on America's three-man diplomatic commission in France, which opened up both an international career and a fresh perspective on American politics and society. When Adams reached Braintree in late November, following his resignation from Congress, he believed that his exhausting national service was at an end, and he immediately resumed his law practice with the hope of refreshing his family's diminished fortunes. But upon learning of his diplomatic appointment in December, he promptly accepted it and made preparations for his departure.

In February 1778, Adams boarded a vessel with his ten-year-old son John Quincy Adams to cross the Atlantic Ocean.[34]

Before appraising John Adams's European decade, one must ask why he was chosen to go to Europe, and what he did there. He would probably never have left America were it not for the dubious performance of his predecessor, Silas Deane of Connecticut. When Deane's economic activities in France raised questions in America, Congress recalled him and, following its traditional manner of making appointments, sought to preserve a regional balance on its commission by seeking another New England man to join Pennsylvania's Benjamin Franklin and Virginia's Arthur Lee. Adams was a natural choice, both as a former congressman, which nearly all of America's early diplomats were, and as the author of Congress's Plan of Treaties of 1776, America's first blueprint for conducting its foreign policy.[35]

Adams's decade of service abroad involved several different, often overlapping missions, in the principal cities of three different nations. The development of his ideas about aristocracy primarily occurred during his postings in France and the Netherlands, culminating in his negotiating with Great Britain the Treaty of Paris of 1783, which formally ended America's War for Independence. His first mission, to the three-man commission in France, was relatively brief, from his arrival in Paris in April 1778 until Congress's replacement of the commission by a sole envoy, Benjamin Franklin, which became effective in February 1779. Adams's duties on the commission closely matched his abilities and experience: he brought order to the commission's substantial paperwork, which was more consular than ambassadorial in character; he prodded his colleagues to seek greater French naval support for America's army; and he tried to keep clear of the growing antagonism between Franklin and Lee. In face-to-face dealings with French diplomats, he wisely deferred to Benjamin Franklin, who was better suited to the task by temperament and experience.[36]

After the dissolution of the commission, it took Adams several months to arrange a secure return passage to America. When he landed in Massachusetts in August 1779, he assumed, as he had in November 1777, that his public service was at an end, and again he looked forward to resuming his legal practice. His unexpected assignment to prepare a new constitution for Massachusetts did not alter this plan, but a second surprise decision by Congress did. In September 1779, that body chose John Adams to be its sole commissioner to negotiate peace with Great Britain whenever the British government was prepared to talk, and in mid-October it issued him instructions and posted him again to Paris. In November, Adams set sail on a French warship, accompanied by his two older sons.[37]

Adams's second diplomatic mission began inauspiciously. In February 1780, when he arrived in Paris, the British were far from ready to talk peace. Despite military setbacks in 1777 and 1778 and an apparent stalemate on the battlefield in

1779, several of their leaders, urged on by a determined King George III, still thought they could defeat the Americans, and they were just as determined to defeat their old enemy, France, which had formally entered the war in alliance with America in 1778. Adams was fully aware of the British ministry's resolve, and he expected the corresponding diplomatic stalemate to last for some time. He was convinced that the British would not consider negotiations until American armies and, he hoped, French navies and armies had convinced them that they could not regain the colonies they had lost. What he did not expect was the cool reception he received from the French foreign minister, the Comte de Vergennes, who disliked Adams and regarded his mission as an annoying distraction when France was focusing its efforts on challenging British naval power. In July 1780, after five months of deteriorating relations with Vergennes and his colleagues, Adams took what he thought would be a short visit to Holland; there he hoped to make some small contribution to advancing America's interests. He stayed for over two years, with important and gratifying results, before returning to France to resume his peace mission.[38]

Following the frustrations of Paris, Adams's two years in Holland, from August 1780 to October 1782, were stressful, dangerous to his health, and remarkably productive. He initially hoped only to encourage Dutch bankers to take a more positive view of America's prospects in its struggle for independence, in advance of the arrival of Congress's envoy to the Netherlands, Henry Laurens. But after learning of Laurens's capture and imprisonment by the British, and then receiving a separate commission from Congress to handle Dutch affairs, Adams committed all his efforts to bringing the Netherlands over to America's side. His long campaign of confidential negotiations and public propaganda among the political, intellectual, and financial elites of The Hague, Leyden, and Amsterdam finally secured Dutch recognition of the United States (in April 1782), the first of several loans from Amsterdam bankers to the cash-starved American Congress (in July), and America's second treaty of commerce with a foreign power (in October). Adams's notable propaganda efforts also helped advance the fortunes of the Netherlands's pro-republican Patriot Party, which would become a matter of some importance in 1786, when he sat down to write his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*.[39]

In 1781, as he labored in Holland, Congress changed its diplomatic strategy to secure peace and placed Adams at the head of a five-man commission, with Franklin, John Jay, Henry Laurens, and Thomas Jefferson. But not until in the winter and spring of 1782 did the British ministry, finally convinced that its forces could not win the war, began to signal its willingness to open talks with America's envoys. Jefferson had declined serving on the peace commission, and with Laurens still recovering from his harsh imprisonment in the Tower of London, and Adams committed to critical negotiations in Holland, Franklin and Jay handled the initial discussions with the British in Paris. In October

1782, immediately upon signing the Treaty of Amity and Commerce with the Netherlands, Adams joined them, and in five weeks of intense negotiations, the three Americans concluded a preliminary peace with Britain (November 1782). This agreement quickly ended hostilities in America, but Adams, Franklin, and Jay had to wait for nine months in Paris until all the European belligerent parties—Britain, France, Spain, and the Netherlands—were ready to conclude final treaties. On 3 September 1783, Adams and his colleagues signed the Treaty of Paris, by which Britain granted America formal recognition of its independence and generous boundaries for the new nation.[40]

The foregoing narrative of John Adams's official activities in France and Holland up the Peace of Paris, presented as a spare frame of reference for his thoughts and emotions in Europe, has deliberately avoided a full appraisal of his strengths and weaknesses, his successes and failures, as a diplomat. Such an appraisal, however important to a deeper understanding of John Adams as a public servant, is largely outside the scope of a study of his political thought. This narrative also says little about the new political setting in which Adams thought and worked or about how he reacted to his new environment. But these matters, his response to his novel situation in Europe and his new relationship to Congress in America, are of the first importance to understanding the development of his political ideas during his decade abroad.

Adams tackled his first European assignment with his usual energy and with apparent optimism, but his removal to an utterly new venue, in a foreign city where he had few prior acquaintances and no friends, was a wrenching change whose impact he was slow to appreciate. As a professional, he was better prepared for both routine administrative business and for diplomacy than most congressmen. His knowledge of European history and law was probably unrivaled in British North America; as president of Congress's Board of War he had displayed a voracious appetite for hard work; and as a seasoned attorney, he was a skilled negotiator. But in his lodgings and the commission's office, both located in the house occupied by Benjamin Franklin in Passy, outside Paris, Adams was lonely for his family and increasingly frustrated at the failure of his political friends, both in Massachusetts and in Congress, to correspond regularly with him.[41]

For every possible reason, John Adams should have made a greater effort to build a closer relationship with Benjamin Franklin, whom he had known fairly well in Congress in 1775–76. A real friendship with Franklin would have made his first mission in France far less lonely and isolated; it could have been even more beneficial to Adams from 1780 to 1783, when he needed a friend, adviser, and ally in his difficult dealings with the French foreign minister, Vergennes, and ultimately with Congress as well. But from the outset of his residence at Passy, Adams was offended by his elder colleague's lax attitude toward routine work and his self-indulgent social life. He was also disappointed to learn, immediately

upon his arrival in France in April 1778, that America's commissioners had recently concluded not only a treaty of amity and commerce with France, just as he had recommended in his Plan of Treaties of 1776, but an armed alliance was well—a more demanding relationship, which required American commitments that Adams viewed as both unnecessary and possibly quite troublesome.[42]

Adams's other colleague, Arthur Lee, was of no help, either personally or professionally. Lee's deep distrust of nearly everyone, British, French, and American, and his strong dislike of Franklin, made him an impossible colleague. Adams was soon persuaded, against the prior expectation and subsequent belief of most congressmen—and the unshakable conviction of many historians—that Franklin, not Lee, was America's most valuable envoy in Paris. On at least one occasion during the fall of 1778, despite his strong friendship with Arthur's older brother, Congressman Richard Henry Lee, he secretly joined Franklin on a matter in which he did not trust Arthur Lee's judgment, to act as a two-man commission so important work could be done.[43]

As early as May, Adams concluded that America's three-man commission was unnecessary and privately conceded that Congress would do better to appoint a single envoy to Versailles. Congress, quite independently, reached the same conclusion by September 1778, when it voted to elevate Franklin and void the commission. Adams, knowing nothing certain about this decision until early 1779, made his most important policy contribution to the work of the commission in the early winter of 1778–79 by persuading Franklin and Lee to submit a memorial to the Comte de Vergennes, urging that the French immediately send a major naval expedition to North America to try and tip the military balance in America's favor. But this bold initiative had little evident result beyond irritating Vergennes, who had never warmed to Adams.[44]

Although Adams did not learn of the appointment of Benjamin Franklin as sole minister to France and the dissolution of the commission until February 1779, he had been deeply uneasy about the state of American diplomacy since November. When he first heard rumors of Franklin's appointment in the fall, they were accompanied by other rumors that he, Adams, might be sent as an envoy to Holland or Spain, or even to Vienna, where, in each case, he thought it unlikely that he would be officially received. In the winter his distress deepened as he read Silas Deane's "To the Free and Virtuous Citizens of America," his predecessor's angry defense of his conduct in Paris, which included a direct attack on Arthur Lee. This essay, published in Philadelphia in December 1778, appeared in English and French newspapers in early February 1779. Upon reading it, Adams was immediately outraged at its author. But he was also fearful that he would be branded a partisan in Congress's sharp division into supporters of Franklin and Deane versus backers of Arthur Lee, with Adams strongly presumed to be Lee's ally. Franklin and Deane were universally seen as strongly pro-French, while Lee and Adams were thought, with good reason, to be cooler

toward America's new ally. On 9 February 1779, Adams unloaded his frustrations to Abigail: "Thus much I can say with perfect sincerity, that I have found nothing to disgust me, discontent me, or in any manner disturb me, in the French Nation. My Evils here arise altogether from Americans."[45]

Three days later, on 12 February 1779, when he finally learned of the commission's dissolution, Adams seemed genuinely relieved. The following day he wrote to Abigail: "I have received Intelligence much more agreable, than that of a removal to Holland, I mean of being reduced to a private Citizen which gives me more Pleasure, than you can imagine. I shall therefore soon present before you, your own good Man." But the following week, with no word from Congress clarifying its intentions for him—word that he would, in fact, never receive—he feared for that most precious possession of any eighteenth-century man of honor. "My Life," he wrote to Abigail on 20 February, "has been often in danger, but I never considered my Reputation and Character so much in danger as now. I can pass for a Fool, but I will not pass for a dishonest or a mercenary Man." By 28 February, a deeper gloom had set in, as he confessed to Abigail:

> The Scaffold is cutt away, and I am left kicking and sprawling in the Mire, I think. It is hardly a state of Disgrace that I am in but rather of total Neglect and Contempt. . . . If I had deserved such Treatment, I should have deserved to be told so at least, and then I should have known my Duty.
>
> . . . . if I had committed any Crime which deserved to hang me up in a Gibet in the Face of all Europe, I think I ought to have been told what it was—or if I had proved myself totally insignificant, I think I ought to have been called away at least from a Place, where I might remain a Monument to the Want of Discernment in sending me here.[46]

John Adams's tacit dismissal from his first diplomatic post in February 1779 was the first great shock of his political career. Never before had he filled any public office—Braintree town selectman, Massachusetts legislator, or member of the Continental Congress—with anything less than the thorough approval of those who elected him and, it would appear, of the majority of his colleagues as well. This success had matched his professional career, in which he had in just over a decade become his province's most distinguished lawyer. Paris, in February 1779, was a new, different, and frightening experience. Emotionally distant from both Arthur Lee and Benjamin Franklin, and treated by Congress as if he were "totally insignificant"—almost as if he did not exist—Adams discovered a bitter side of public service that he had never known before. Over the next five years in diplomatic service, as he came to know this feeling well, he developed a keen sensitivity to any obstruction, and a deep resentment of any disapproval of his performance of his official duties, even when, on occasion, it was not intended. And as he had confided to Abigail just days before he learned of the

commission's demise, these evils nearly always arose "altogether from Americans" and, more specifically, from the Congress of the United States.[47]

When John Adams was a member of Congress, from September 1774 to November 1777, he appeared largely satisfied with that body, for good reason. If his colleagues sometimes moved too slowly for his taste and made decisions with unnecessary deliberation, he was pleased with what they decided. And from its first meeting, Congress listened attentively to Adams, placed him on major committees, and assigned him increasingly important roles in drafting its official documents. He soon became the leading Massachusetts delegate in floor debates, and by July 1776 he was considered by many colleagues to be the most powerful and persuasive orator in the house. Moreover, although the members of Congress showed unmistakable signs of regional differences from the outset, the chamber was largely free of rancorous factional divisions, which John Adams always regarded as a cardinal sin in any body of government.

The Congress that John Adams viewed from Paris with increasing dismay from November 1778, just one year after he resigned his seat, to February 1779, looked very different. By now, it had become even more deliberate. In the business that most directly affected Adams, Congress voted to replace its three-man commission to France with Benjamin Franklin in September 1778 and approved his instructions in October—its normal pace of business—but did not send off Franklin's commission and instructions, its only official notification of its decision, to Paris until January 1779. This leisurely pace of business did not reflect legislative complaisance. By December 1778, when Silas Deane issued his defense of his commission service, in which he maligned both Arthur Lee and Congress itself, the chamber was already deeply divided. On one side stood the supporters of Deane and the unqualified admirers of Franklin and of the French; on the other, the supporters of Arthur Lee, including his brother Richard Henry Lee and several New England delegates, among them Samuel Adams, who were still wary of France's intentions toward America. John Adams, who had been a close friend of Richard Henry Lee since 1775, was so strongly presumed to be an unquestioning member of the "Adams-Lee" faction that most historians over the past two centuries have both assumed and asserted that he was an ally of Arthur Lee and an enemy of Franklin during his ten months on the commission. Both the commission's papers and Adams's own correspondence, however, show that he tried to steer a neutral course between Franklin and Lee, when he did not ally with Franklin as the more competent and sensible envoy.[48]

In the fall and winter of 1778–79, John Adams first came to view a political institution composed entirely of leaders of his own country in a profoundly negative light. If he had ever thought to label Congress with a single word or phrase during the three years of his service in it, he might well have called it an aristocratic assembly. In light of his prior good opinion of traditional aristocracies in

the local and provincial politics of Massachusetts, his intended meaning for this label would have been entirely positive. The Congress, a relatively small body of some thirty to fifty members in regular attendance, depending upon the season, chosen first by colonial assemblies and conventions, and then by state legislatures, was an imposing gathering of assembly speakers and other legislative leaders, and highly accomplished lawyers. Nearly every member was a seasoned and prominent political figure in his native colony or state. For political brilliance the early Congress had no equal in America before Independence, and perhaps has had no equal since that event, with the exception of the 1787 constitutional convention in Philadelphia. Although there were several self-made men in that body, few had made sizable fortunes, and many others had inherited their estates. At least until Independence, Congress was not a gathering of newly wealthy men; in its economic and social composition, it was a fairly close analogy to the constituted aristocratic bodies that dominated several eighteenth-century European republics.[49]

But as America's War for Independence created a large Continental army, increased the size and sophistication of state militias, and launched scores of privateers, it spawned a host of aggressive new occupants of both old legislative and administrative offices at the local and state level and of many new offices, in every state capital and in Philadelphia. The supplies these officers directed to the nation's soldiers and sailors, the funds needed to purchase those supplies, and the taxes needed to raise those funds all grew rapidly. America's army of new officials, and several old ones as well, managed these growing quantities of goods, services, and revenue, but thousands of other men—farmers, merchants, and every sort of transporter and middleman—actually provided these vital necessities. The entire process was facilitated by vast amounts of paper currency, much of it issued by Congress.

In Paris, a parallel growth of military supplies intended for America occupied the attention of a smaller number of French officials and French merchants, who developed close relations with a few American merchants in France, and with Silas Deane and Benjamin Franklin. Little of this activity, either in America or in France, was illegal, and much of it was not even unethical. But everywhere wartime activity swelled old fortunes or created new ones. And among the many honest, hardworking officials and merchants on both sides of the Atlantic were a few men who thrived on speculating in scarce commodities, in European stocks, or in Continental and state currency. Inevitably, these men of new wealth, whether their fortunes came from skill and hard work, from fortunate circumstances, or from uncontrolled speculation, began to affect both the image and the conduct of public business, in the Massachusetts legislature, in Congress, and in France.

Adams had first noticed America's new men of wealth in Massachusetts in the spring of 1777 and characterized them in the most unflattering terms. By

1779 he was seeing their entrepreneurial brothers in Philadelphia and Paris as well. The division of Congress into the Franklin-Deane versus Adams-Lee factions was the strongest proof that America's only national political institution, an impressive embodiment of British North America's traditional aristocracies in 1774, had become something quite different by 1779: an oligarchy split into bitterly partisan blocks that were indifferent to the larger body's—and the nation's—honor, an honor that, in Adams's view, could only be based on the highest traditions of public service and, not incidentally, on the decent treatment of its own servants abroad.

But John Adams did not call Congress either an aristocracy or an oligarchy in February 1779, nor had he labeled Massachusetts's new men of wealth an aristocracy in his 1777 letter to Samuel Freeman. His frequent employment and evolving definition of the labels aristocracy and oligarchy in assessing contemporary politics would not begin until 1786, when he sought to connect what he was seeing in America to the architecture of the mixed, free, republican governments that he regarded as the heart of the Western political tradition. When he did begin to use the word aristocracy, he sought to expand its definition in ways that would embrace America's new political leadership, including its Congress.

Shortly after his return to America in August 1779, John Adams received a pleasant surprise from Congress. Because he had never been officially informed of the dissolution of the commission in Paris, and upon his return had to present his financial accounts to Congress and see them carefully poured over and nitpicked, he had no expectation of ever again receiving that body's approbation. But on 27 September 1779, he was appointed America's sole commissioner to negotiate peace with Great Britain. The vote was not uncontested; John Jay was nearly chosen for the post but was finally sent instead to Spain. The distribution of votes for Adams and Jay clearly reflected both Congress's enduring regional divisions—evident in some degree in every decade to the present day—and the continued rancor between the Franklin-Deane and the Adams-Lee factions. These dissensions would continue to affect Adams's diplomatic career for several years.[50]

Yet Congress's support for Adams in September 1779 was not ephemeral. The delegates would affirm their confidence in him in 1780, would qualify that confidence in 1781, and would then strongly renew it in 1784 and 1785. These endorsements suggest that Congress's failure to draft a polite letter to Adams, thanking him for his public service, when it dissolved the Paris commission and named Franklin sole envoy to France in September 1778, may have been an oversight rather than a clear sign of disapproval. Across the entire decade of Adams's diplomatic service, Congress as a whole was usually at least mildly approving of his performance, but was often distracted by other matters, or was simply indifferent to his difficulties, as it often was to those of its other envoys. There would

be times when many congressmen were highly critical of Adams's conduct of diplomacy, but his second mission to Europe began with at least as strong a show of congressional support as his first.[51]

The spring of 1780, however, was the first time in John Adams's diplomatic career when his frustrations did not "arise altogether," or even primarily, "from Americans." The French foreign minister, the Comte de Vergennes, convinced that Congress had acted prematurely in naming a peace commissioner, barred Adams from formally announcing his mission in a way that would give it maximum effect in Europe. Then, in June 1780, the foreign ministry tried to elicit from Adams a disapproval of Congress's recent devaluation of its currency, particularly as it affected French merchants. Adams, however, after seeking the support of Benjamin Franklin and failing to get it, stoutly defended the Congress. In this rather puzzling controversy, neither Vergennes's motive nor Franklin's is quite clear, but Adams was left feeling wronged by Vergennes and abandoned by Franklin.[52]

In July, Adams twice expressed his frustration with the French foreign minister, at first rashly, then more creatively. His audacious response was to propose again, as he had in December 1778—but this time without Franklin's support—that France should send a stronger naval force to America. Vergennes became so incensed at Adams's impertinence that he declared he would say no more to him on matters that involved France and the United States but would deal only with Benjamin Franklin. Even before Vergennes could write this stinging final reply, however, Adams set off on what he evidently believed would be a brief visit to Holland to see if he could advance America's interests there. His visit quickly became an extended residence that gave him enough distance from the French minister, and from his venerable American colleague, to allow him to work effectively, as needed, with both men.[53]

The Dutch venture's greatest gift to John Adams, however, was his diplomatic independence. In Amsterdam, Leyden, and The Hague he could execute an important mission that was his alone. He was free to establish contacts, make friends, and recruit allies from among the Dutch republic's many bankers, writers, editors, burgers, and noblemen who were frustrated with the Prince of Orange's pro-British policies and eager to establish political and commercial connections with the new young republic in America. From August 1780 to October 1782, John Adams was quite on his own, as he had never been in any public office before, but as he would be for much of the rest of his career. In Congress from 1774 to 1777, on the commission in Paris in 1778–79, and even when nominally autonomous, again in Paris, in the spring of 1780, he had to adjust his ideas, initiatives, and temperament daily to the will of others. This had worked much better in Philadelphia than it did in Paris. In Holland, John Adams was often lonely, cold and damp, and, for one long month, dangerously ill, but he was always free. Beginning in 1782, however, he suddenly confronted an effort to

curtail his precious independence, an effort centered in an all too familiar location, the American Congress.[54]

Adams's relations with Congress began to unravel in 1781, but owing to an unusual combination of circumstances, it was not until the winter of 1782 that he even became aware of the problem. By the spring of 1781, France had become concerned that America might conclude a separate peace with Britain and leave France to face the British navy alone. Such an act was expressly prohibited in the Franco-American treaty of 1778, but as added insurance against such a disaster, Vergennes sought control over America's diplomats, particularly John Adams. Congress was in a difficult situation. The decisive victory at Yorktown was still several months over the horizon; what Congress could see all around it was military stalemate, a severely stressed currency and economy, and a single financial lifeline, existing and potential grants and loans from the French treasury. In June 1781, it revoked Adams's commission as sole peace negotiator and placed him at the head of a five-man commission, with John Jay, Henry Laurens, Thomas Jefferson, and Vergennes's favorite American envoy, Benjamin Franklin. And at the urging of the Chevalier de la Luzerne, France's minister to America, Congress inserted language in the commission's instructions that directed its envoys to keep France fully informed of all their business and to defer in any negotiations to their ally's judgment.[55]

When Adams received a copy of the new peace commission in late August 1781, he professed himself unconcerned at acquiring several new colleagues. But two circumstances prevented his learning of Congress's intended relationship between America's diplomats and the French foreign minister for over a year. The first was the defective encoding of key passages in Adams's new instructions by Congressman James Lovell, a member of Congress's Committee for Foreign Affairs. The second was Adams's nearly fatal illness in Amsterdam, which struck him just as he was trying to make sense of Lovell's mysterious text. Upon his recovery, Adams either put aside or simply forgot about the instructions, and as there was no immediate prospect of peace negotiations, he resumed his energetic pursuit of Dutch support for America.[56]

A second development in Congress, however, would affect Adams well before he had to deal with the instructions to the new peace commission. In August 1781, the delegates finally replaced their often ineffectual Committee for Foreign Affairs with a single secretary, Robert R. Livingston, who accepted the position in October and immediately began corresponding with Franklin in France, Jay in Spain, Francis Dana in Russia, and Adams in Holland. This last relationship, due in part to another unforeseen circumstance, quickly became contentious. In May 1781, Adams had presented a memorial to the States General of the Netherlands, the republic's ruling assembly, even though the States General had not officially received him, and he simultaneously published the memorial, which requested immediate Dutch recognition of American inde-

pendence. When he had done all this, he wrote a full account of his actions to the president of Congress. But Adams's letter was so badly delayed in crossing the Atlantic that by the fall of 1781, Livingston and Congress had heard of his bold initiative indirectly, without any account of it from his own pen.[57]

Livingston's second letter to Adams, of 20 November 1781, initiated an often tense exchange that lasted into the summer of 1783, just as America's envoys were preparing to conclude the definitive Treaty of Paris with Britain. Livingston began his November letter with a summary of routine American news, before turning to the current state of Dutch politics and lodging his first complaint, that Adams's letters "leave us in the dark relative to the views and principles of each [political] party [in the Netherlands], which is no small inconvenience to us, as we know not how to adapt our measures to them." He then became more critical of his envoy:

> We learn from Mr Dumas, that you have presented your credentials to the states general, we are astonished that you have not written on so important a subject, and developed the principles that induced you to declare your public character, before the States [General] were disposed to acknowledge it. There is no doubt from your known prudence and knowledge of the world, that some peculiarity in your situation, or that the politics and parties of the United provinces furnished you with reasons that overballanced the objections to the measure which arise from the humiliating light in which it places us. Congress would, I believe wish to have them explained, and particularly your reason for printing your memorial.

Livingston concluded with his firm belief that there was nothing that could induce the Netherlands to conclude a treaty of amity and commerce with the United States and that Adams's best policy was simply to reside in Holland and be available for any business that the Dutch, or the French ambassador to the Netherlands, might propose to him.[58]

The secretary's timing could hardly have been worse. Adams received Livingston's haughty, scolding letter on 19 February 1782, just seven days before the first of the Netherlands' seven provinces approved Adams's memorial, and only eight weeks before the full States General voted to recognize American independence. Because Livingston was, through no fault of his own, thoroughly out of touch with his envoy's situation in Holland and quite ill-informed about what Adams was achieving there, he could never shape American policy toward the Netherlands. Adams's freedom to set his own course and follow it through was not threatened so long as he remained in Amsterdam or at The Hague.

Nevertheless, John Adams felt deeply aggrieved. Congress had initiated its diplomatic efforts in Europe by giving its envoys a few general directions—in its Plan of Treaties of 1776, which Adams himself had written, and in the individual instructions for its commissioners to France in 1776 and 1777, for Adams and

Jay in 1779, and for Adams's Dutch mission in 1780–81—and then left them largely on their own. One or another member of its small committee of foreign affairs occasionally wrote to individual diplomats, but Adams discovered that his letters to Congress, nearly one hundred from France in 1780, and another hundred from Holland in 1780–81, were routinely laid before the members for their perusal, but were almost never answered. He initially hoped that Congress's appointment of a secretary of foreign affairs, an official who was charged with reading every letter from America's diplomats promptly, and promptly replying to each one, with authoritative commentary based on the secretary's understanding of Congress's current concerns and intentions, would be beneficial, but he was soon disabused of this expectation.[59]

From John Adams's perspective, everything about the new secretary's November letter was wrong. First, Livingston presumed to be well informed about the complexities of European politics, despite never having been to Europe or served as a diplomat to any foreign power. For whatever reason, the secretary implied that he was as knowledgeable about Dutch affairs as Adams, who was a decade his senior, was a distinguished veteran of Congress, and had been working in and learning about the Netherlands for more than a year. Second, perhaps as a function of his high social position as a member of one of the most powerful and wealthy families in New York, and his rich political connections in the middle states and in Congress, Livingston began his correspondence by adopting a superior air, which could not have pleased a man of Adams's more modest background. Finally, Livingston was a partisan of the pro-Franklin and ardently pro-French faction in Congress and was disposed to distrust Adams from the outset. Nor was this simply his individual disposition; his appointment as secretary in August 1781 was part of the plan, begun in June, to bring America's diplomats, and in particular John Adams, more securely under the control of America's ally, France, and its foreign minister, the Comte de Vergennes.[60]

Because of his strong position in the Netherlands, on which he had become America's greatest authority, Adams was able to fend off Livingston through the spring and summer of 1782. He did respond with frequent letters to the secretary, which began (on 19 and 21 February) with a painstaking justification for his bold policy, then relayed the full details of the Dutch recognition of America, which occurred on 19 April, the first loan by Dutch bankers to Congress, concluded on 5 July, and finally the successful completion of a treaty of amity and commerce, signed on 8 October. Livingston's responses vacillated between renewed complaints that Adams was not writing to him (29 May and 29 August), brief cautions about negotiating a treaty (4 July), simple gratitude whenever he finally received parcels of Adams's letters (5 March and 30 May), and finally, brief remarks of appreciation for Adams's achievements (15 September and 18 November 1782, and 13 February 1783).[61]

Well before the completion of his Dutch negotiations, however, Adams became aware of a larger problem, the anticipated peace negotiations with Britain in Paris. In May, Livingston began prodding him for any news about the intentions and actions of the British ministry and then repeated his queries in August and September, prompted in part because Franklin in Paris was no more forthcoming on the subject than Adams in Holland. The secretary also conveyed his own thoughts on negotiating peace and insisted that he not be kept out of the whole process. By mid-September, exasperated at the secretary's earlier lecturing and scolding over the Dutch negotiations, and uneasy about what awaited him in Paris, Adams sat down to draft a most revealing letter to Livingston, a letter that he evidently did not finish or send, and probably never intended to send. It powerfully conveys John Adams's hostility toward Congress's determination to place a dutifully subordinate, thoroughly instructed diplomatic corps under the superior judgment of Secretary of Foreign Affairs Robert R. Livingston:

> Your Letters express a Desire that I Should endeavour to form an Acquaintance with the Representatives of Crowned Heads, and you Seem to be of the Opinion that much may be learned from their Conversation. It is very true that Hints may be dropped, Sometimes which deserve to be attended to, and I Shall not fail to avail myself of every opportunity of learning any Thing from them, that may occur.
>
> But one might recollect, upon this occasion with great Propriety, a Saying of the Chanceller D'oxensteirn. He told his Son, that he intended to Send him as Ambassador, to a Congress for a Pacification. Sir, Says his Son I have never made the Studies necessary to qualify me—never fear Says the Father I will give you all the Instructions which will be necessary.[62]

Just a week before his departure for Paris in October 1782, Adams received a letter from Arthur Lee in Philadelphia, who warned him to expect the greatest difficulties in the peace negotiations in Paris, both from Congress's 1781 instructions, which subordinated America's commissioners to Vergennes, and from Livingston, who was prepared to do Vergennes's bidding. Adams, who had never completed deciphering the 1781 instructions, replied that he simply did not believe Congress could have tied its diplomats' hands so tightly. Shortly after his arrival in Paris on 26 October, however, he finally saw the full text of the instructions and learned that John Jay, who had come to France that summer from Madrid to join Franklin in the negotiations, had vociferously objected to them back in September 1781, as Adams certainly would have done had he known the full text. Unfortunately, he also concluded, without the slightest evidence, that Franklin had deliberately kept the text of Congress's instructions secret from him in the summer of 1781. Adams's stubborn adherence to this conviction

suggests a growing anxiety about his diplomatic position, which would play a role in his behavior over the next year.[63]

In the last five days of October 1782, John Adams met with Jay and with Franklin in Paris, resolved with them their policy toward Congress's instructions to its commissioners, and joined them in negotiations with the British envoy, Richard Oswald, all before writing his next letter to Livingston. Adams was just as upset about the full text of Congress's instructions when he finally read them as Jay had been over a year earlier. And he joined Jay in persuading Franklin that they must conduct their negotiations without informing the Comte de Vergennes of what they were doing. But in his letter to Livingston, he exercised great diplomatic restraint. The 1781 instructions (with the coded text in italics) were quite clear; they had directed the commissioners: "to make the most *candid & confidential communications to the ministers of* our generous Ally the King of France *to undertake nothing in* the Negotiations for Peace *or truce without their knowledge & concurrence & ultimately* to govern yourselves by *their advice & opinion*."[64]

Adams, however, in his letter of 31 October, pretended to see the matter quite differently:

> I find a Construction put upon one Article of our Instructions by Some Persons, which I confess I never put upon it my self. it is represent[ed] by Some, as Subjecting Us to the french Ministry, as taking away from us, all right of Judging for ourselves, and obliging us to agree to whatever the french Ministers Shall advise us too, and to [do?] nothing without their Consent.—I never Supposed this to be the Intention of Congress. if I had, I never would have accepted the Commission, and if I now thought it their Intention, I could not continue in it. I cannot think it possible to be the Design of Congress. if it is, I hereby resign my Place in the Commission and request that another Person may be immediately appointed in my Stead.

Although it is not certain this letter ever reached Secretary Livingston, Adams here adroitly sought two objectives. First, he cleverly portrayed himself as better informed about the controversial article in Congress's instructions than he was. Rather than admit that he had just read the full text fourteen months after receiving it, he pretended that he had never put upon it the—in fact unavoidable—construction given it by some unnamed other persons. Second, he placed the onus for such a construction, if that were in fact Congress's intention, squarely on the Congress itself.[65]

Whatever the fate of this letter, the negotiations proceeded on the understanding that Adams and Jay demanded, which was in Jay's words, approvingly quoted by Adams, "To be honest and gratefull to our Allies, but to think for our selves." In the course of shaping the Preliminary Treaty that they concluded with Britain on 30 November 1782, however, the three Americans were not in

perfect harmony, and after mailing off the finished text to Philadelphia in mid-December, Adams, Jay, and Franklin each sent to Congress his own account of the negotiations, of which Adams's "Peace Journal" was by far the longest. By the time Livingston received their handiwork, in March 1783, he had resigned his position but agreed to serve into the spring until Congress could find his replacement. Soon thereafter his letters to Adams ceased, but not his dismay with his diplomats. On 25 March, he addressed the peace commissioners to congratulate them for concluding the Preliminary Treaty and then to chastise them for their "distrust manifested in the management of it, particularly in signing the Treaty without communicating it to the Court of Versailles 'till after the Signature."[66]

For John Adams, Livingston's March letter to the commissioners, coming after a January letter to John Jay that also criticized the commissioners' distrust of France, which Jay showed to Adams, was the last straw. On 18 July 1783, all three commissioners signed a defense of their actions to Livingston, but only after a sharp disagreement among them. Jay had agreed to draft the commission's reply to Livingston, and Adams immediately approved Jay's candid text, which included implicit criticisms of Congress and explicit charges of obstruction of America's peace objectives by the French foreign minister, but Franklin would not sign it. Jay and Adams finally agreed to drop the most aggressive passages in Jay's draft, but not without further contention.[67]

It would appear that in their discussions, all the frustrations that Adams had felt with Livingston since receiving the secretary's first letters in 1782, with Vergennes since their first quarrel in 1780, with Franklin almost from the beginning of their common diplomatic labors, and with Congress since it abruptly left him in limbo in February 1779 finally boiled over. Before the commissioners could agree on a reply to Livingston, Adams began writing letters critical of France to the secretary and to Congress's superintendent of finance, Robert Morris. To Morris, with whom he had built up a long correspondence centering on securing Dutch loans for America, Adams gave voice to his anger over France's impediments to the peace negotiations with a freedom that he, and John Jay, could not convey to Livingston in any letter that Franklin would sign. He illustrated the central objection to the American commissioners' submitting their preliminary treaty with Britain to Vergennes before signing it with a vivid image: "We must have waited for France & Spain, which would have changed the Ministry in England and lost the whole Peace, as certainly as there is a World in being. When a few frail Vessells are navigating among innumerable Mountains of Ice, driven by various Winds and drawn by Various Currents, and a narrow Crevice appears to one by which all may escape, if that one improves the Moment and sets the Example, it will not do to stand upon Ceremonies and ask which shall go first, or that all may go together."[68]

Whatever John Adams actually said, and however he really behaved, in his discussions with his colleagues, it was the commissioners' contentious mid-July

assessment of their own performance as peace negotiators, and perhaps also a knowledge that Adams had begun leveling charges against Vergennes to Morris, and even to Livingston himself, before the commissioners had agreed on the text of their common letter, that prompted Franklin to write to Livingston on 22 July, to explain his own position and to observe, in unforgettable language, that John Adams "is always an honest man, and often a wise one, but at sometimes and in some things absolutely out of his senses." Livingston, having finally left both his post and Philadelphia in June, never received Adams's July letters, the commissioners' joint letter, or Franklin's letter, but all were routinely opened and read by other congressmen, and both Adams's opinion of Vergennes and Franklin's characterization of Adams quickly became public knowledge.[69]

John Adams's difficult relationship with the Comte de Vergennes over some three years, and his criticism of Benjamin Franklin, first for sympathizing too strongly with Vergennes in the fall of 1782, and then for monopolizing other diplomatic business that the commissioners might have performed jointly in August and September 1783, did damage his diplomatic reputation in Congress—and with historians and the broader American public down to the present day—but it did not finally undermine his official position. Most New England delegates and several from other states still supported him, and in 1784 Congress appointed him to the commission to negotiate commercial treaties with European powers. His colleagues were Thomas Jefferson, with whom he quickly renewed a friendship that began in Congress in 1775, and Franklin, with whom he would get on better once the commissioners had secured and signed a definitive peace in the Treaty of Paris on 3 September 1783. And Adams was fortunate that further contact with the Comte de Vergennes was both minimal and quite unnecessary to his new mission.

5. The Question of Neurosis and Paranoia in Adams's European Diplomacy

John Adams's alleged admiration for aristocracy, which he supposedly acquired at the courts of France and Britain and sought to promote in America, was only the first of two dark accusations arising out of his diplomatic career that have been leveled against him by several of his countrymen. Never tied convincingly to his experience at any one court or in any one nation in Europe, his reputed partiality toward aristocracy, and toward monarchy as well, gained currency both from his political writings of the late 1780s and early 1790s and from his official behavior early in his vice presidency. The second allegation, that John Adams possessed a deeply neurotic personality and eventually developed paranoid fears toward his colleagues in public life, arose out of the dynamics of his relationships with the Comte de Vergennes and Benjamin Franklin from 1780 through 1783.

The image of the neurotic, paranoid John Adams, a man not fully in control of his own emotions, probably began with Franklin's 1783 remark that Adams was "sometimes absolutely out of his senses." Alexander Hamilton vigorously developed that charge in his savage election pamphlet of 1800, *A Letter Concerning the Public Conduct and Character of John Adams*. But the diagnosis, in almost clinical form, was not widely embraced until it was taken up by certain twentieth-century scholars of the American Revolution, and it remains a potent enough element in the larger portrait of John Adams to merit a discussion here, if only to gain a better understanding of the man behind the political and constitutional ideas that Adams was developing and expressing in the 1780s.[70]

Certain aspects of Adams's behavior, and even of his physical appearance, convey a distinct plausibility to the image of the man as nervous, temperamental, and "high strung," perhaps even neurotic. He was, to begin with, an unusually candid and often highly passionate speaker and writer. He had a strong temper, which evidently grew stronger as he got older, and on more than one occasion he flew into a rage when dealing with his political or diplomatic colleagues. Both his appearance and his physical health have also raised questions about his emotional state. Some portraits show him with visibly protuberant eyes, and he suffered two severe fevers, in Amsterdam in 1781 and in Paris in 1783, that have not been conclusively tied to particular physiological diseases but occurred shortly after periods of stressful dealings with persons he deeply disliked.[71]

The historical impact of this pathological image of John Adams has often been to undercut the validity of his ideas and to denigrate the achievements of his public service; to place the irrational feeling man before the rational thinking and acting man. The present study, as an extended essay in history rather than political science, has attempted at several points to relate Adams's experiences and feelings to his political thought, but the pathological argument strikes this writer as highly questionable. A few simple points about Adams's personality, health, and public career should be kept in mind.

First, his strong temper was a source of strength for John Adams, and of great benefit to his countrymen. It drove him to work harder in office than the great majority of his contemporaries. Of the major figures of the Revolution, only Washington and, in the 1780s, Hamilton and Madison rivaled his productivity. His strong feelings were essential to his powerful oratory in Congress, and his passionate commitment to every public mission he undertook pushed aside the personal considerations that delayed or muted the response of several of his contemporaries to the challenges before them. Henry Laurens, upon receiving his commission to negotiate a Dutch loan in 1779, dithered for months before sailing for Europe, was promptly captured by the British at sea, and saw Adams pick up his mission in Holland. Thomas Jefferson periodically favored

private over public life, a choice that his wife must have appreciated, and that Abigail Adams certainly would have. But John Adams never hesitated to put the public interest first.[72]

Second, Adams's severe illnesses in Europe are hardly conclusive proof of neurosis. His fever in Amsterdam was most probably either malaria, a not uncommon malady along the dank canals of that city, or typhus. The cause of his fever in Paris is less clear; it may well have been brought on by both nervous and physical exhaustion after several years of stressful negotiations. Finally, there remains the possibility that Adams suffered from some chronic physical ailment that could explain his episodic illnesses, his agitation, his persistent trouble with his eyes, and his appearance. A diagnosis of Grave's disease—chronic hyperthyroid activity that often causes protuberant eyes—has been suggested, although if Adams did in fact have that ailment, his survival into his ninety-first year without the benefit of modern medication would be rather remarkable.[73]

A third factor, of course, is the widespread tendency of eighteenth-century Americans and Europeans to see the workings of their political world in terms of conspiracy. Since Gordon Wood's splendid exploration of this phenomenon over three decades ago, most historians have been willing to put the perception of a British conspiracy against their liberties by rebelling Americans, including John Adams, into a common cultural framework. Nor does Adams's belief that the Comte de Vergennes was opposed to America's interests at the time of the peace negotiations with Britain suggest either neurosis or paranoia. He did not characterize the French minister's obstruction as a conspiracy, his concern was fully shared by John Jay, and ample evidence shows that he assessed Vergennes's diplomatic objectives in 1781–83 quite accurately.[74]

Only one important aspect of Adams's behavior in his decade in Europe suggests an extraordinary level of envy and suspicion, his relationship with Benjamin Franklin. But even here, the picture is clouded in uncertainty. On Franklin's side, it is clear that over the entire course of his European mission (1777–85), the Doctor had a better understanding of how to present and defend America's interests to the French ministry, the French monarchy, and the French public than John Adams, John Jay, or any other American in Europe, or in Congress. Adams's persistent belief, beginning in October 1782, despite all available evidence, that Franklin had withheld the full text of Congress's 1781 instructions from him may suggest some degree of paranoia. Moreover, once he understood America's need to negotiate peace quickly in the fall of 1782, while a favorable British ministry desperately clung to power, Franklin promptly agreed with Adams and Jay to conduct negotiations with Britain's envoys without Vergennes's approval or certain knowledge. He did this knowing full well that if they were successful, it would be he, not Adams or Jay, who would have to explain to the French minister why they had kept him in the dark. Finally, Franklin's insistence

in July 1783 that the commissioners avoid any criticism of France in their defense of their negotiations to Congress was only sensible and prudent.[75]

John Adams, however, did have legitimate grievances against Benjamin Franklin. The Doctor's decision in June 1780 to let Adams face Vergennes alone in their heated exchange over Congress's devaluation of its currency seems especially questionable, given that the issue essentially involved the Franco-American relationship, for which Franklin had sole responsibility in Paris, and not the peacemaking process, which was Adams's assignment. Franklin's apparent determination in 1782–83 to receive and consider all expressions of interest by other European powers, particularly Sweden, Prussia, and Portugal, in concluding commercial treaties with America, without consulting Adams or Jay, was bound to offend the sensitive New Englander. Although Adams and Franklin worked effectively together on their first joint commission and again, by correspondence, on routine official business when Adams was in Holland from 1780 to 1782, the two men virtually never functioned as equal, mutually respected colleagues after 1779. Indeed, it is unclear that either man ever really wanted to accept the other as his colleague. Their entire relationship made for a deeply unpleasant experience for each man and generated resentments that John Adams nursed obsessively for over three decades.[76]

Yet rather than pigeonhole John Adams psychologically by characterizing him as temperamentally neurotic and even paranoid in Europe, one could conclude less dramatically, but still with a decisive impact on a balanced assessment of his behavior and his political thought, that for the first half of his European decade Adams grew increasingly stressed, isolated, and unhappy. He responded, in part, by identifying certain men and groups of men as responsible both for his own misery and for certain dangers to which America had needlessly exposed itself in the precarious international environment in which it must live as a newly independent nation. His principal individual opponents were the Comte de Vergennes, Benjamin Franklin, and to a lesser extent Robert R. Livingston. But the larger entities responsible for his and America's perilous fate, the forces that really made his life difficult, were, in his view, the official French nation (and later the British nation) and, of much greater importance, the United States Congress. It was his identification of this last antagonist that most directly contributed to a major change in John Adams's political thought in the 1780s.

6. Aristocracy versus the Public Interest

In surveying John Adams's changing attitude toward aristocracy from the 1750s to the 1780s, one is struck by the role played by his personal vantage point, the political and social position that he occupied at each major juncture of his life during these decades, in shaping what he chose to see and how he characterized what he saw. From his early adulthood until American Independence, Adams paid close attention to the aristocratic leaders and values that prevailed in the

town of Braintree, in the province of Massachusetts Bay, and finally, in the First and Second Continental Congresses. His reaction to each of these aristocracies was overwhelmingly positive. He expressed no reservations about the qualities that determined aristocratic status in all three venues: an established family background; a personal fortune at least sufficient to guarantee political independence; a proven capacity in speech and action in political gatherings and public office, or on the battlefield; and an unmistakable commitment to the public interest, shown most convincingly by placing public service above personal interest. These aristocracies, large and small, like every effective aristocracy, were open to newcomers who could prove their intellectual merit and their public virtue. In the town of his birth, the Quincys were unquestioned members of both the local and provincial aristocracies, but Adams himself could join their select ranks. And whether he observed the town of Braintree, the province of Massachusetts, or the Continental Congress, Adams saw both worthy men of old families and worthy newcomers, all working as true aristocrats should, for the public good of their community, their province, and their new nation.

The harsh realities of the War for Independence soon intruded on this idealistic view of American aristocracy: not the unprecedented sacrifices of war, which tested the mettle of many patriots—soldiers and civilians, men and women—and found many of them true, but the unprecedented economic temptations of wartime, which tested many others and found many of them wanting. Adams began to sense this new reality shortly after Independence. He saw it clearly at work in Massachusetts by the spring of 1777, when he expressed his dismay to the state assembly's speaker, Samuel Freeman. In 1779 his concern for the aggressive behavior of the economic and political leaders of his native state was so strong that, as he confessed to Elbridge Gerry, he feared for the very survival of the constitution that he had just drafted. But it was his difficult dealings with his American colleagues and with the American Congress during his service in Europe, particularly in France and in Holland, which finally destroyed John Adams's faith in the unalloyed virtue of aristocratic behavior, whether one regarded it in Boston, in Philadelphia, or in Paris. By 1783 he viewed all aristocracies, everywhere in the world, as talented, ambitious, and corruptible, as a treasure and as a menace to all governments, but especially to republics. Yet neither the treasure nor the menace could be renounced or rejected. Aristocracies old and new, Adams believed, were unavoidable, ineradicable social and political elements in every nation.

By the mid-1780s, the most important political question for John Adams was no longer American independence, which he and his countrymen had boldly declared to the world, courageously defended on the battlefield, and finally secured in strenuous negotiations with the leading powers of Europe. The pressing political challenge was now this: Could men who wished to live in a free nation, under a government constructed on sound republican principles,

control the menacing forces of aristocracy among them and harness the energies and talents of their most prominent citizens for the public good? Adams never showed the slightest sign of sharing his countrymen's faith that America's aristocrats would simply fade away in the face of its vibrant new egalitarian culture. Nor did he imagine that America's aristocrats, whether born to wealth and power or earning these advantages through their own efforts, could ever entirely behave as virtuous citizens. He would remain convinced, from the 1780s until his death, that many of their number would seek yet greater wealth and power, regardless of the demands of the public good. Finally, John Adams never shared the conviction of James Madison (and of John Locke) that "the first object of government" was to protect "the diversity in the faculties of men from which the rights of property originate."[77] The central objective of government for Adams was always the security and happiness of the whole society, including its weakest members. The only solution to living with aristocracy, therefore, was to control it. He would devote much of the next decade to exploring how this could be done in a republican culture.

VIII

Redefining the Republican Tradition

1784–1787

By the authorities and examples already recited, you will be convinced, that three branches of power have an unalterable foundation in nature; that they exist in every society natural and artificial; and that if all of them are not acknowledged in any constitution of government, it will be found to be imperfect, unstable, and soon enslaved.

A Defence of the Constitutions of the United States,
vol. 1, letter LIII [December? 1786]

You are afraid of the one—I, of the few. We agree perfectly that the many should have a full fair and perfect Representation.—You are Apprehensive of Monarchy; I, of Aristocracy. I would therefore have given more Power to the President and less to the Senate.

To Thomas Jefferson, 6 December 1787

As he moved into his handsome residence in the Paris suburb of Auteuil in August 1784, John Adams could well have believed that his career as a writer had come to an end. Over the past two decades he had used his pen to navigate a grueling series of intellectual and political trials: conceptualizing and defending colonial autonomy, discovering and explaining the essence of republican government, securing independence, writing a constitution for Massachusetts, and forging a peace treaty with Great Britain. That summer he reunited with his family for the first time in nearly five years and gladly resumed the pleasures of domestic life. He still faced the challenge of negotiating commercial treaties with European powers, in tandem with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, but this looked to be the least stressful public task he had ever undertaken. He now had as much time to write as he had ever enjoyed, yet he felt less need to write than ever before.

Formal writing, the composition of essays large and small, for publication in newspapers or as pamphlets, had always been an ad hoc affair for John Adams. At each stage in his career he had written to achieve an immediate purpose. In the early 1760s he wrote to clarify his own ideas and gain a local reputation as an intelligent, disinterested civic voice. The sudden advent of the Stamp Act soon prompted another purpose, to defend his native province against the most serious challenge to its autonomy in nearly a century. In the early 1770s he wrote to explore, define, and defend colonial autonomy. In the mid-1770s he wrote to claim a republican form of government for America's rebelling colonies. In 1779 he wrote to create a new government for his native Massachusetts. And in the early 1780s he wrote to establish a strong political and commercial position for America in the family of Western nations. For almost two decades Adams had written nothing for publication simply because he wanted to write, and he had never felt a need to defend anything he had ever written or to extend his modest reputation as an author.[1]

But if Adams believed he was done with writing, he had lost none of his love for reading deeply in the works of other writers, whether current, recent, or ancient. He read less law and legal history than he had before Independence, but more political history and political theory. In the mid-1780s he tackled at least two authors in whom he had long felt a keen interest but had never had the time to study in earnest: Plato and Machiavelli. It seems probable that when he began this endeavor in the fall of 1784, he had only a vague intention of placing any knowledge he might gain before the public.

In the 1780s, however, both America and Europe were just as politically engaged as they had been over the two preceding decades. Adams himself drew a new and challenging assignment in 1785, when Congress appointed him America's first minister to Great Britain. In 1786 the Netherlands' anti-stadtholder Patriot Party, many of whose leaders Adams had known since his first diplomatic labors in Holland from 1780 to 1782, peacefully secured control of several major cities, just as thousands of debt-ridden Massachusetts farmers were rising up in Shays's Rebellion against the state's dominant mercantile elite and its base of political strength, the state Senate so carefully crafted by Adams himself just seven years earlier. And in early 1787 the French monarchy, in financial difficulties brought on in part by its participation in America's War for Independence, convened an Assembly of Notables to address the problem.

John Adams might have ignored the rising political turmoil in Holland, in France, and even in his beloved Massachusetts, but he could not ignore a more personal challenge. In 1784, Dr. Richard Price, the political economist and dissenting preacher whom Adams would soon befriend in England, published *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution*, to which he appended a long letter addressed to him in 1778 by the late Anne-Robert Turgot, Baron de

l'Aulne. In the letter, this prominent *philosophe*, political economist, and one-time French comptroller of finance, whom Adams had met upon his first arrival in Paris in 1778, sharply criticized the structure of government of several of the new American states, with their bicameral legislatures and independent executives, placed within a complex architecture constructed on principles of checks and balances and the separation of powers. Turgot's target was the balanced style of government that Adams had espoused in 1776 and would incorporate in his draft of Massachusetts's new constitution in 1779. In John Adams's eyes, Turgot's letter challenged America's political honor, and his own political honor was hardly unaffected.[2]

In response, between October 1786 and December 1787, John Adams wrote his magnum opus, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*, in three volumes. This complex work recapitulated and redefined his understanding of the theory of republican constitutionalism that had, by the late eighteenth century, returned to the center of the Western political tradition. The publication of these volumes would reshape John Adams's political and intellectual reputation, in both Europe and America. The *Defence* was neither John Adams's most influential political work nor his best, but it had at least two distinctions. It was the longest work of political science by an American author produced during the Revolutionary era. And it was, in the view of at least one authority, the last major work written in the classical republican tradition of Machiavelli and Harrington.[3] For the purpose of the present study, however, *A Defence of the Constitutions* is something more: the richest source of John Adams's ideas about executive authority, aristocratic power, and the defense of the people in a republican form of government.

1. Reading and Thinking in France, England, and Holland

Writing to Royall Tyler in January 1785 from her residence in Auteuil, Abigail Adams reported that she was sitting at the fireside, reading a French comedy, while "my best Friend [is] studying his favorite Author, Plato." Three decades later John Adams told Thomas Jefferson that he had indeed been engaged that winter in reading through all of Plato's dialogues systematically, and in December 1784 Abigail had told her older sister, Mary Cranch, that John was reading Plato's *Laws*. Nothing survives to show when Adams began this study or when he ended it, but a brief survey of his public obligations yields a few clues.[4]

There is no hint in any source that John Adams read a single page of political philosophy between the summer of 1776 and Abigail's December 1784 letter to her sister, and from February 1785 to the fall of 1786 there are no more references to his studies. Yet from October through December 1786, Adams cited, and quoted at great length, a broad range of political authors as he wrote the first volume of his *Defence of the Constitutions*, including several writers whom he had barely ever mentioned before. And in 1787 he would explore in detail several

additional authorities in the second and third volumes of the *Defence*. When could he have acquired the knowledge to write this massive work?

The heavy demands of John Adams's public career, first in Congress and then on diplomatic missions in France and Holland, make it unlikely that he could have engaged in any serious study that was not immediately related to his work between 1776 and the formal conclusion of peace with Britain in 1783. And for nearly another year, a serious illness and recovery in France, his first visit to England, and a return to ongoing diplomatic obligations in Holland fully occupied his time. But in May 1784, Congress instructed Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson to negotiate commercial treaties with several European powers. To perform this new duty, Adams promptly prepared to move from Holland to Paris, where he soon enjoyed the leisure, in a congenial physical and domestic setting, to pursue serious intellectual work.[5]

The end of the War for American Independence had finally allowed Abigail Adams to cross the Atlantic in relative safety, and her arrival in London in July 1784 with her daughter, Abigail (Nabby), to meet John and John Quincy, reunited the parents and their two older children for the first time since November 1779. Through his contacts in France, John secured the most spacious and elegant private residence that either he or his family ever occupied, at a reasonable rent. And his new assignment, after an initial burst of diplomatic correspondence in the late summer and early fall, unexpectedly allowed him ample time to spend as he chose. Congress had authorized its commissioners to conclude treaties with more than a dozen nations and hoped that several would open trade with the new American republic. But the few European countries with the greatest commercial interest in America had either already signed treaties with its diplomats—France in 1778, the Netherlands in 1782, and Sweden in 1783—or, in the case of Great Britain and Spain, did not wish to do so. Over the next three years, only three more nations, Prussia, Portugal, and Morocco, would conclude treaties with America's commissioners.[6]

In his parlor in Auteuil during the long fall and winter evenings, John Adams devoted some of his free time to helping prepare John Quincy for college, but he directed most of his energies to a careful reading of Plato, and possibly of other political writers as well. Although he had studied classical Greek in college, he knew his linguistic limitations. To understand the philosopher in depth, he acquired a parallel Greek and Latin text of Plato's entire corpus and a few translations of the most famous dialogues into French and English, and moved back and forth, from text to text, and language to language. Whether he actually read through all of Plato's dialogues while he lived at Auteuil is unknown, but it is certain that he studied the two longest, the *Laws* and the celebrated *Republic*.[7]

Although Abigail characterized Plato as her husband's "favorite Author," Adams himself later remembered that the aristocratic Athenian disappointed

him and that "his Laws and his Republick from which I expected most, disappointed me most." But anyone familiar with his lifelong fascination with intellectually challenging texts cannot imagine that his studies were anything less than pleasurable. Given the length and complexity of Plato's works, he probably continued exploring the dialogues into the spring of 1785, until his departure for England as America's first minister to the Court of St. James's. During this final year in France, however, Adams's labor of love may have had an ulterior motive. Stimulated by a recent discussion about government with the Marquis de Lafayette and Thomas Jefferson, he evidently contemplated writing a work on "the titled Nobility." But he never began any such inquiry, and in early 1787 he made it clear that the *Defence*, of which he had completed the first volume, was not that projected work. Soon after reaching the British capital, however, Adams had reason to wonder whether he might soon receive another unplanned sabbatical from the rigors of diplomacy.[8]

When John Adams arrived in London on 26 May 1785 with his two Abigails, he had reached the peak of his diplomatic career. After years of arduous, frustrating, and occasionally humiliating labor, first in commission with two incompatible colleagues in Paris (1778–79), next on his own, but in comparative obscurity, in France (1780) and in Holland (1780–82), then on the inharmonious but triumphant commission to conclude peace (1782–83), and finally on the less stressful, less productive mission to negotiate commercial treaties in Paris, he had secured the honor to be presented to King George III as America's first minister to Great Britain. He was now a veteran diplomat and, with two treaties under his belt, he was a statesman. His posting to Britain should have been a most rewarding capstone to a long and increasingly distinguished career. As events unfolded, however, diplomacy once again disappointed John Adams, who would turn to other pursuits to make his London years more fruitful and enjoyable.[9]

Britain wanted to trade with America, and by the mid-1780s it was trading with America quite briskly. By 1786 it had resumed its pre–Revolutionary War position as America's largest, although no longer quite so exclusive, trading partner. But the British ministry was quite satisfied with the terms of trade that its nation already enjoyed following the peace and the opening of American ports to all the world. It had no wish to grant its recent enemy any new commercial rights, and it was especially protective of its Caribbean sugar colonies, where American merchants hoped to restore the open trading relationship they had enjoyed before the North American colonies left the British Empire. For several months Adams tried to break down British resistance, but he got nowhere. By his first winter in England he found that his time was again largely his own, and it would remain so until he concluded his diplomatic mission in February 1788. For over two years in London, he had as much time to study as he had in Auteuil, and to write as well.[10]

In the winter of 1786, John Adams resumed thinking seriously about the nature of government and again voiced his wish to study the political role of the aristocracy, the subject he had mentioned to Jefferson before leaving France. Now, however, his ambition began to broaden, to include the political purpose and value of distinct social classes in every nation. The expanded scope of his vision pointed clearly toward his *Defence of the Constitutions*, but eight months before he began that work, he evidently considered distinctions of rank to be artificial and, on balance, deleterious to the health of society. Writing to his good friend, Count Sarsfield, on 21 January, he confessed:

> I have half a mind to devote the next ten years to the making of a book on the subject of nobility. I wish to inquire into the practice of all nations, ancient and modern, civilized and savage, under all religions,—Mahomatan, Christian, and Pagan,—to see how far the division of mankind into patricians and plebians, nobles and simples, is necessary and inevitable, and how far it is not. Nature has not made this distinction. Art has done it. Art may prevent it. Would it do good or evil to prevent it? I believe good, think what you will of it. How can it be prevented? In short, it is a splendid subject; and, if I were not too lazy, I would undertake it.[11]

For the moment Adams appeared willing to be a bit lazier than was his habit. As the weather improved, he took time from his diminished diplomatic obligations to travel to places that promised pleasure as well as business, and with more stimulating companions than had accompanied him on several tedious trips from France to Holland, and back, from 1780 to 1782. In early spring America's new minister to France, Thomas Jefferson, crossed the Channel to join Adams in negotiating a commercial treaty with the Portuguese ambassador to Britain. Before business, however, the two envoys spent the first week in April 1786 touring grand English country houses and, of special interest to Jefferson, fine English gardens.[12]

Jefferson soon returned to Paris, and by midsummer much of official London had left for the country. But Adams, having some business to attend to in the Netherlands, decided to take his wife on a tour of the nation where he had enjoyed his first diplomatic triumph. His political timing could not have been better; his many friends in the radical Patriot Party were just reaching the height of their power in their struggle with the Netherlands's chief executive and military commander, Prince William of Orange. Leaving London in early August, John and Abigail crossed the North Sea and visited The Hague, Leyden, Amsterdam, and Utrecht. In that last city, they witnessed the ceremony that inaugurated a new, more radically republican government. Abigail vividly described their journey to her daughter in London and her sisters in Massachusetts. By early September, the Adamses were back in England, and John immediately began gathering materials for his magnum opus.[13]

2. Turgot's Letter, Adams's Honor, and the Republican Prospect

The circumstances that gave rise to *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States* cannot be determined with precision. The best general introduction to John Adams's motivations for writing the *Defence* is C. Bradley Thompson's *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty* (1998), the only full-length treatment of this singular work. As Thompson makes clear, when Adams sat down to write, he faced distinct European and American audiences, and political events both in Europe and America in which he had a keen interest developed so rapidly in the fifteen months during which he composed his three long volumes that his potential audiences kept growing.[14]

At the beginning of the *Defence*, Adams clearly states that the pointed criticisms of America's first state constitutions by the late Baron Turgot in a recently published 1778 letter to Dr. Richard Price prompted his lengthy reply. Turgot's letter first appeared in print as an appendix to both the English and French editions of Price's *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution* in 1784, two years before Adams began to compose the *Defence*. Adams evidently heard something of Turgot's letter as early as November, but he may not have read it until the spring of 1785, when he received a copy of the English edition of Price's tract from the author. At this point, he entered critical marginal notes to the text, evidently the first marginalia he ever produced. But when Adams finally composed his *Defence*, he made no use of his earlier comments.[15]

Turgot's letter, in part a response to Dr. Price's recent criticism of his performance as France's minister of finance, was dated 22 March 1778, just under three weeks before Adams first met Turgot, on his second day in Paris. Much of the letter's content would have caused him little difficulty, either in 1778 or later. Turgot warmly favored religious toleration, criticized two American states for requiring discriminatory civic test oaths, and urged the American states to unite in a more powerful alliance than that provided in the Articles of Confederation. But when Adams first read the letter, probably in the spring of 1785 while he was still in France, one passage caught his eye. Turgot was unsatisfied with America's constitutions because

> by most of them the customs of England are imitated, without any particular motive. Instead of collecting all authority into one centre, that of the nation, they have established different bodies, a body of representatives, a council, and a governor, because there is in England a house of commons, a house of lords, and a king. They endeavour to balance these different powers, as if this equilibrium, which in England may be a necessary check to the enormous influence of royalty, could be of any use in republics founded upon the equality of all citizens, and as if establishing different orders of men was not a source of divisions and disputes.[16]

When he made this criticism, Turgot had read either the texts, or summaries of or extracts from the texts, of the constitutions of Pennsylvania and Delaware, and probably of New Jersey as well. He could also have read or become familiar with the constitutions of Virginia, Maryland, and New York, all of which were available in Europe by March 1778. Ironically, his criticisms of the structure of American state constitutions applied least to unicameral Pennsylvania, which it is certain he knew, but more pertinently to other early constitutions, especially that of New York, that he may not have read. But the one American state constitution that was the perfect target of Turgot's criticism he had never read, because John Adams had not yet written it: the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780. If in the 1780s Adams felt called upon to defend America's constitutions of 1776 and 1777 against Turgot's attack, he must have felt an even greater need to defend his own creation, the very embodiment of the classical republican tradition that Turgot condemned.[17]

The short title of *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States* has created some confusion about the genesis and purpose of this work. Casual students of American history may assume that the text either focuses on or at least includes a discussion of the federal Constitution of 1787, but Adams completed the first volume of the *Defence* in the December 1786, five months before the opening of the constitutional convention in Philadelphia. His second and third volumes, written in 1787, before, during, and after the convention, make no substantive comment on that national document or the political movement that led to its creation. More surprising is the fact that Adams's *Defence* contains no extensive analysis, either individually or collectively, of America's state constitutions, which its title explicitly promised to defend.[18]

Perhaps it is this lack of a clearly developed objective that has driven historians to look for Adams's motivation in the events of 1786 and 1787. Some, focusing on Europe, have speculated that it was a sense of the possibility of constitutional reform in France, excited by the calling of the Assembly of Notables for the winter of 1787, that prompted him to write. Others, more plausibly, discover the impetus for the work in America—the outbreak of agrarian protest that grew into Shays's Rebellion in central and western Massachusetts in the late summer and fall of 1786. Here they would appear to be on firmer ground because in his "Preliminary Observations" in volume 1 of the *Defence*, Adams states that "by advices from Boston, certain committees of counties have been held, and other conventions proposed in the Massachusetts, with the express purpose of deposing the governor and senate as useless and expensive branches of the constitution."[19]

Concern over both developments may have played a role in keeping Adams at his desk for nearly fifteen months, but neither French aristocrats nor Massachusetts farmers prompted him to begin writing the *Defence*. The fiscal problems of the French monarchy that the Assembly of Notables was summoned to

address in 1787 had not yet cohered into a clear constitutional problem when he began writing, and the unrest that grew into Shays's Rebellion, of which his friends and relations in Massachusetts gave him his first intelligence, was still in its early stages. Adams's description of the popular protests in Massachusetts in his "Preliminary Observations" appears to fit events that had not yet occurred by mid-August 1786, the latest period of which he could have known by 4 October, the date that he affixed to that opening letter (but perhaps not the date on which he completed it). Moreover, the first volume of the *Defence* makes no reference to any movement for reform in France, and Massachusetts's difficulties do not appear again after the "Preliminary Observations."[20]

Another event, however, unquestionably did spark Adams's interest in beginning this work, his month-long visit to Holland (6 August–2 September 1786), where he and Abigail directly witnessed a late and momentarily triumphant stage in Europe's first republican revolt against the established order since America's Declaration of Independence. John Adams had followed the rising fortunes of the Netherlands's Patriot Party since its beginnings in 1780, and modern scholars credit him with having contributed substantially, by his energetic propaganda campaign for Dutch recognition of America's republic, to that movement's growth in 1781 and 1782. He was not involved in the party's activities in 1786, but he was deeply interested in its prospects and discussed current politics with several Dutch Patriots during his visit. The first volume of the *Defence of the Constitutions* can be read, in part, as advice to Adams's Dutch friends about how to—and how not to—reform their republic. His treatment of the Dutch republic in that volume gives some support for this speculation.[21]

The strongest link between his initial motivation for writing the *Defence* and his Holland journey, however, is an undated letter directed to his son-in-law, William Stephens Smith, which Adams evidently composed in September or early October 1786, after his return to England. The only extant text of this letter is either his copy of a lost original or, more likely, a draft that may never have resulted in an actual letter, but its intended recipient, the uncertainty of its character as a real letter, and its content all tie it directly to Adams's fifty-seven "letters" addressed to Smith that compose volume 1 of the *Defence*.[22]

The surviving text begins by stating the official reason for Adams's "Excursion to the Continent," to sign America's first commercial treaty with Prussia at The Hague, but he quickly turns to his real subject.

> I happened to be at Utrecht, on the Day of the memorable Ceremony of Administering the Oaths to the new Magistrates. The Novelty, the Dignity and Majesty of that Scene, made a deep Impression on my Spirits. An old established Government, laid in the Dust, and a new one erected from the Founda-

> tion, by the Sovereign Will of a Free People, is a Spectacle if not new, at least very rare in Europe. The Order, and Decorum as well as the Solemnity and Gravity, which I Saw, in the great Square at Utrecht, were astonishing.[23]

That moving experience and "Reports of Similar Revolutions in various other Cities, in several other Provinces of the [Dutch] Republic," together with "the general Conversation I had with Men of Letters and publick Spirit in all the Cities," soon

> threw me into a train of thinking upon what has happened in the World, within the last thirty Years, particularly in America, in Ireland & Holland. Having a long Passage from Helvoet[sluis, in Holland] to Harwich, I fell into a deep Sleep and had a long Dream, which if I were not afraid of tiring your Patience I would commit to Writing & transmit to you.
>
> I thought, that the natural Principles of Government, had taken So deep root, as to have produced Revolutions in America Ireland and Holland, and Seemed to be pushing forward, with great vigour. But it was a question whether there might not be more heat than Light, and whether there was not danger that Innovations might not be injudi[ci]ously made which would require other Changes before Mankind would be Satisfied. Where shall We go for Advice?
>
> I dreamed that I made a Visit to the other World to my Friend De Mably in the Celestial Regions, whom I found in Company with Aristotle, Plato [break in the text?] consulting upon the best Advice to be given to the United States Holland Ireland and all other People and Countries in Similar Circumstances.

A long passage from Harrington's *Oceana* follows, before the close of "this Letter, already to[o] long, with assurances of my constant Esteem and Affection. John Adams."[24]

Yet even given this proximate connection between Adams's experience in Holland and his beginning the *Defence*, to suggest that the state of Dutch politics, like the prospects for political reform in France or the growing unrest in Massachusetts (and in Ireland), prompted the composition of this singular work is to project Adams's motivation too narrowly. His larger intent was to discredit what he saw as a fundamentally misguided European, and specifically French, way of looking at republican architecture in favor of a sounder American approach. One must remember that the full title of the *Defence*, which is seldom given in discussions of the work, is *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America, Against the Attack of M. Turgot, in his Letter to Dr. Price, Dated the Twenty-Second Day of March, 1778*. In mounting the broadest historical and philosophical assault of which he was capable against the constitutional thesis of Turgot's letter, which is the only stated intention of his work,

Adams could defend the American political tradition; justify his own constitutional handiwork, both in *Thoughts on Government* and in the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780; warn Dutchmen, Frenchmen, and Irishmen against creating highly centralized, monolithic governments; and encourage his Massachusetts neighbors to resist the Shaysites' demand for a government with a unicameral legislature and weak executive and judicial powers.[25]

3. *A Defence of the Constitutions*: Structure and Purpose

A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States comprises three volumes; they were originally published separately, and any careful analysis of the whole work must recognize the distinctive character of each of its parts. This is particularly true of the first volume, which does not read as the beginning of a larger work. It is quite uncertain that when he began writing it, as he was writing, and even when he had finished his text, Adams had any intention of producing a subsequent volume. Abigail reported that as late as November 1786, her husband "means only to publish a few [copies] for the present and those only for himself and Friends." Given the text's irregular form, it is equally uncertain that, during its initial composition in October, he had any clear idea of how long it might be or what it might contain. These considerations connect the volume to the manner of composition that Adams employed in every piece he ever wrote for publication. Charles Francis Adams, who edited the *Defence* in the 1850s, effectively characterizes this pattern: "The author was always prompted to write by a sense of the necessity of immediate exertion, and, therefore, in this as in all other instances of his composition, he took too little care of the shape in which his thoughts were clothed."[26]

Because the *Defence of the Constitutions* grew to such massive size and made such a distinctive contribution to early American political writing, Charles Francis Adams decided to edit and publish it for nineteenth-century readers essentially unabridged, in as presentable a form as possible consistent with scrupulous accuracy. But the reader who is only familiar with John Adams's *Defence* from C. F. Adams's edition of his grandfather's writings, with its many reworked chapter titles and subchapter headings, is in for a surprise upon opening any early British or American edition of this work.[27]

The *Defence*, which Charles Francis edited with uncommon skill and presented in volumes 4 through 6 of his edition of John Adams's *Works*, opened with Adams's Preface to his first volume, dated 1 January 1787, before moving to the substance of his argument. In its original form, this argument began with a letter dated 4 October 1786, from Adams to his son-in-law and official secretary, William Stephens Smith. The text continued, in unbroken epistolary form, though nearly sixty numbered letters, most but not all with titles, and several with subtitles and internal divisions, indicating their contents with varying accuracy, to the end of the first volume. The numbered letters were probably not

actually sent to Smith, who was in London for the entire time that Adams was writing this volume, but were simply a common literary device of the period.[28]

Even making allowances for Adams's epistolary structure, however, the arrangement of his materials within this volume approaches the chaotic. Only his first letter and his last, of 21 December 1786, are dated, and the letters vary greatly, both in length, from a single paragraph to nearly thirty pages, and in complexity. Twice Adams repeats letter numbers, with two distinct texts for numbers XXVII and XXXIX. Many of the letters deal with a single well-defined topic and comment on a single historical or literary source; others embrace several topics and take on several authors, with frequent quotations, often in several languages. Other passages are close paraphrases of his sources, often without clear demarcations or attribution, and several clearly marked quotations appear without a source. Taken together, quotations and paraphrases make up much the greater portion of the text of all three volumes of the *Defence*. The entire work takes this form because Adams chose to defend his larger thesis, the superiority of mixed governments with effective checks and balances (the Anglo-American tradition) over unitary governments (the French tradition), largely by examples of republics whose histories supported his argument, whether by their governments' mixed and balanced perfections or, far more often, by their unbalanced imperfections, and by appeals to the authority of writers from Plato to Hume who developed republican political theory with greater or lesser insight and skill.[29]

In the most complex first volume, a fairly effective table of contents supplements the individual letter titles, so that it is relatively easy to locate Adams's treatment of particular historical republics. Because many of the letters either lack titles or have misleading or incomplete titles, however, it is more difficult to locate several of Adams's discussions of his many political philosophers and historians, and only the fine index to C. F. Adams's edition of his grandfather's *Works* allows ready access to his more occasional references to these authorities. The structure of the entire volume is needlessly convoluted, beginning with a survey of modern republics in three categories—democratic, aristocratic, and monarchical (letters III–XXIII)—followed by modern political writers (letters XXIV–XXIX), then by (mostly) earlier political writers (letters XXX–XXXIV), then by earlier republics, again in Adams's three categories, in a less regular arrangement (letters XXXV–LII), and finally by a concluding section with letters on the American Congress and on Locke, Milton, and Hume (letters LIII–LV), and a postscript on Adams's recently deceased friend, the Abbé de Mably. The second and third volumes of the *Defence*, with few "letter" divisions, are more straightforward. They are devoted entirely to just two subjects: the constitutional history of a handful of major republics in medieval Italy (vols. 2 and 3), and a long and spirited attack on the thought of the seventeenth-century English political writer Marchamont Nedham (vol. 3). Adams abruptly ends the entire

work with a brief conclusion that makes virtually no reference to the arguments in either his second or third volume.[30]

Several historians have commented on the frequent incoherence of the *Defence of the Constitutions*. J. G. A. Pocock, who characterized the work as "the product of an obsession with disorder so pervasive that it becomes disorderly itself," concluded that Adams was "scarcely in control of his materials." Such severe criticism needs a few words of context. First, while several extended political and economic treatises of the early modern period were highly organized—one thinks immediately of Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* and Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*—many other celebrated works were not, including Algernon Sidney's *Discourses on Government* and Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*. Second, of course, is Adams's lifelong pattern of ad hoc composition in which his writing of the *Defence* is an exceptionally disorganized chapter, in part because of its great length. Finally, one must observe that Adams, with little clear idea of the larger shape of his work at the outset, wrote his magnum opus too quickly and devoted little if any time to revising his text. He composed the fifty-seven numbered letters in the first volume of the *Defence*, nearly four hundred octavo pages, in just over twelve weeks.[31]

4. Volume 1: Modern and Ancient Republics and Writers

Volume 1 of the *Defence* is a long and complex work, but for the student of John Adams's political thought it need not be so intimidating as it might appear at first glance. The *Defence*'s most ardent admirer has endorsed an earlier estimate that three-quarters of this volume consists of quotations and paraphrases from its many sources.[32] The volume's fifty-seven letters are devoted to three different kinds of material. Adams began with—and after a long break to discuss modern and ancient writers returned to—brief portraits of the political structure of dozens of republics, both modern and ancient. Little of this material is original. When he turned to consider the writings of political philosophers and historians, he again quoted or paraphrased through most of his text, with some of the French and Latin and virtually all of the Greek sources translated into English. But in five sections—his Preface (written last); his first two letters, entitled "Preliminary Observations"; letter XXIII, entitled "Recapitulation," which follows his survey of modern republics; letters XXV and XXVI, entitled "Dr. Franklin" and "Dr. Price"; and the last three letters (LIII–LV)—John Adams speaks extensively in his own voice.

Adams's historical examples probably held considerable appeal for exceptionally curious eighteenth-century readers, particularly among his own countrymen, because many of the republics he described were utterly unknown in America, and works that attempted to compare several republics, whether celebrated or obscure, were relatively uncommon. The modern reader, however, is likely to find these political vignettes less informative. Adams could have used

this material to develop complex theories about the structure of republican governments, and C. Bradley Thompson has argued that both his survey of republics and his selections from the works of political thinkers were compiled as "a guidebook for lawgivers," intended for all those, in Europe or America, who aspired to design new republican governments or to reform and defend existing ones. But many of Adams's historical examples were ill-designed to perform this function. His appraisals of most of his republics are quite superficial, highly dependent on a single source, or hopelessly inaccurate. His rapid tour through the Swiss cantons reads as much like a travel guide as it does a political primer. His long recounting of the history of Athens entirely misunderstands that city's pioneering democracy, although here his confusion and ignorance were hardly greater than those of even his more sophisticated European contemporaries. More remarkably, John Adams provided no analysis of the only republics that he knew well from direct observation and even, in several cases, from politically productive involvement: the seven provinces of the United Netherlands and the thirteen American states.[33]

Adams's consideration of the work of political philosophers and historians is more satisfying. He began with Jonathan Swift, then turned to his own contemporaries Benjamin Franklin and Richard Price, and next brought in Hume, Locke, Sidney, and Harrington, as well as Rousseau and Montesquieu, all writers who had interested him for many years, before moving back to Machiavelli, and finally to the ancients: the Romans—Tacitus, Livy, and Cicero—and their Greek predecessors—Polybius, Aristotle, and Plato. He devoted particular attention to his favorite political writers, James Harrington and Niccolò Machiavelli (he was the only American writer of his generation to take the Florentine seriously), but he wrote his longest letter on Plato, about whom he had mixed feelings. Adams was thoroughly skeptical of the idea of philosopher kings, but in the eighth book of Plato's *Republic* he found a superb discussion of the different kinds of republics, of their evolution from one type to another, and of the character of the citizen that each kind of republic produced, which resonated well with his own long-held convictions about monarchy, aristocracy, and the people.

Adams opened his argument in letter I, dated 4 October 1786, by quoting Turgot's essential objection to America's first state constitutions, "that by most of them the customs of England are imitated, without any particular motive. Instead of collecting all authority in one centre, that of the nation, they have established different bodies, a body of representatives, a council, and a governor, because there is in England a house of commons, a house of lords, and a king." He refuted the charge that the new states were simply imitating the architecture of England's government by observing that the Americans had always lived under three-branch governments, and continued them from the conviction "that [they were] founded in nature and reason." But he admitted that there was,

"from the beginning of the revolution in America, a party in every state, who have entertained sentiments similar to these of Mr. Turgot." Two or three of these states, he continued, "have established governments upon his principle," and, in a passage he may have written sometime after the letter's dateline, he stated that he had just received reports that popular gatherings in Massachusetts were considering abolishing the governor and the senate "as useless and expensive branches of the constitution," which was, of course, *his* constitution. Concerned that the publication of Turgot's opinion had excited such discontent, he decided he must oppose it.[34]

The core of Turgot's argument was that all political authority must be collected "into one centre, that of the nation." Adams briefly entertained the possibility that the *philosophe* envisioned the whole people, no matter how numerous, assembling together to make any decision, but decided that Turgot must instead have intended "that an assembly of representatives should be chosen by the nation, and vested with all the powers of government"—essentially the system that France would adopt between 1792 and 1795, at the height of its revolution. Although Adams would, in the course of the *Defence*, repeatedly dismiss the physical possibility of a simple democracy by mass assembly, his essential argument, from his first page to his last, was that a unitary representative government, without distinct branches of contrasting character assigned to different governmental tasks that enabled them to check and balance political power, was inherently unstable and would inevitably degenerate into an oligarchy or a tyranny.[35]

To prove his point, Adams offered a survey of virtually every republic then existing in Europe, which he divided into three categories: nine "democratical republics," fourteen "aristocratical republics," and two "monarchical republics." His "democratical" category included the ancient Italian mountaintop republic of San Marino; a small confederation of Basque village-republics that centered on the city of Bilbao on Spain's northern coast (the only European republic, except for the Netherlands, that Adams had ever visited); seven fairly rural, largely agrarian Swiss cantons whose names would scarcely be known to anyone living at any distance from the Swiss confederacy; and finally, mentioned in a single sentence, two of the Netherlands's seven provinces and one Dutch city that were reputed to have "certain remnants of democratical powers." He evidently selected these states simply for their common reputation as democratic, and all of them did grant all adult males the power to elect some or all officials and at least a theoretical right to assemble together and approve major laws or treaties. But Adams showed that none of these republics used their provisions for mass assemblies, while all of them chose a chief magistrate or executive officer and at least two representative bodies of different size with legislative or advisory functions. Moreover, most of their officials and representatives, whether nominated, appointed, or elected, had to meet particular requirements for office that set them off in some degree from the general populace.[36]

Adams's "aristocratical republics" were quite different. His ten aristocratic Swiss cantons were all richer and more commercial than the seven cantons he labeled "democratical," and several of them were fairly well known outside Switzerland, including Bern, Lucerne, Zurich, and, of course, Geneva. To these he added the last three surviving Italian commercial republics, Lucca, Genoa, and Venice, and concluded with a brief note on the confederation of republican provinces in the Netherlands (commonly called the Dutch Republic). Some of these states, he observed, had initially granted their entire populace a role in government, but as they grew large and wealthy, all had made their principal organs of government more exclusive. At the same time, Adams stressed that, like the democratic republics, all had executives with distinct powers; not one invested all power in a single legislative house. Moreover, in Switzerland these cantons, far wealthier and more powerful than their more democratic neighbors, also had a greater tendency to become oligarchies because they had never balanced their dominant aristocracies with strong executives and powers reserved to the people. And although Adams could not foresee this, the three Italian republics would all lose their independence and be absorbed into neighboring monarchies before 1815, the last chapter in the decline and fall of republican government in Italy that had been in progress for several centuries.[37]

The last "aristocratical" republic, however, deserves special notice. The seven provinces of "The Republic of the United Provinces of the Low Countries," including the two that were allegedly more democratic, presented a particular problem for John Adams. He briefly summarized the Netherlands's complex institutions, which included a hereditary executive with limited powers (the Prince of Orange, called the stadtholder), several other executive and judicial officials, and both provincial and national assemblies, all making a most complex commercial and largely aristocratic republican confederation. But discretion compelled him to forgo any discussion of the one European republic that he knew from extensive personal experience. He briefly explained his dilemma: "The history of this country, and its complicated constitutions, affords an inexhaustible store of materials to our purpose, but, considering the critical situation of it, prudence dictates to pass it over." His caution was not unwarranted. The Patriot Party, which Adams personally favored and admired, was just then reaching the height of its power, but in 1787, at the invitation of the Princess of Orange, her brother, King Frederick William of Prussia, invaded Holland and crushed the Patriots, and yet another European republic found itself facing extinction.[38]

Adams's last category, "monarchical republics," must have astonished many of his readers, but it would have been less surprising to those, probably few, who had carefully read and still remembered his identification of Britain's constitutional monarchy as a republic in his *Letters of Novanglus* (1775) and, more briefly and indirectly, in *Thoughts on Government* (1776). In the *Defence*, however,

Adams made less of this category than he might have. He identified only two such republics, England (not Britain) and Poland, and to England, the world's most powerful republic if one accepted his label, he devoted just over two pages (letter XX), remarking, "[W]ho can think of writing upon this subject after De Lolme, whose book is the best defence of the political balance of three powers that ever was written[?]"[39]

But John Adams could not refrain from praising his favorite non-American constitution. After conceding that the House of Commons should reform its inequitable representation and stop seating members advanced by the House of Lords, he declared: "I only contend that the English constitution is, in theory, the most stupendous fabric of human invention, both for the adjustment of the balance, and the prevention of its vibrations; and that the Americans [contra Turgot] ought to be applauded instead of censured, for imitating it, as far as they have. Not the formation of languages, not the whole art of navigation and ship building does more honour to the human understanding than this system of government." He then conceded two flaws in American constitutions, the denial of an absolute veto to the executive, and the popular election of militia officers—the same objections he made to the Massachusetts convention's alteration to his draft constitution in 1779–80. But he finished his brief comparison of the British and American constitutions with a more important American superiority, the making of all their governors and senators elective rather than hereditary. He closed by expressing his Harringtonian faith that Americans, enjoying an unusually broad distribution of property in every state, would never need to alter their constitutions "until great quantities of property shall get into few hands."[40]

Adams evidently planned to treat Poland even more briefly than England. In one of the shorter letters in the *Defence*, he summarized the structure and character of its weak elective monarchy and its theoretically powerful but internally hamstrung legislative diet of nobles and concluded: "Here again is no balance; a king, and an assembly of nobles, and nothing more: the nobles here discover their unalterable disposition, whenever they have the power, to limit the king's authority; and there being no mediating power of the people, collectively or representatively, between them, the consequence has been, what it always will be in such a case, confusion and calamity." At this point, however, Adams acquired a recent analytical travelogue of Poland and Russia and added a second letter, largely copied from his new source, which recounted Poland's history over three centuries in some detail. He ended on a tragic note, the utter inability of Poland's king and diet to prevent Prussia, Austria, and Russia from lopping off large portions of their nation's territory and seizing control of valuable commerce in the First Partition of Poland (1772–73).[41]

There is no evidence that John Adams's novel "monarchical republics" either bemused or offended many readers when the first volume of the *Defence* ap-

peared in 1787. But by the early 1790s many Americans, reacting in part to his recent series of newspaper essays, "Discourses on Davila" (1790–91), would begin to express their dismay at his praise for the English constitution, despite its powerful hereditary monarchy, as a republican model. And in France, many leaders of that nation's revolution, having thoroughly embraced the unitary government tradition of Rousseau, Turgot, and Condorcet, would be just as put out by Adams's unqualified endorsement of Jean de Lolme's *Constitution de l'Angleterre*. Adams's designation of Poland as a "monarchical republic," however, attracted little criticism, perhaps because that nation, soon to disappear for over a century, was always less prominent than England. But it is worth noting that, while he had candidly criticized the weakness of Poland's monarchy, Adams had forthrightly attributed a large share of that weakness to the total lack of power of the common people.[42]

Letter XXIII of the *Defence*, accurately entitled "Recapitulation," is one of the strongest in the entire volume. In just six pages, entirely in his own prose, Adams effectively summarizes the lessons he has learned from the some two-dozen contemporary European nations whose governments "may be called, in any reasonable construction of the word, republican."[43] But this recapitulation does much more; it neatly epitomizes the core of John Adams's constitutional thought as it had developed over the preceding quarter century. Each paragraph is a pointed refutation of the relevant portion of Baron Turgot's critique of America's balanced constitutions and his argument for the superiority of a unitary government.

Adams begins with a defense of the first element of the traditional tripartite conception of republican government that was so dear to him. "Among every people, and in every species of republics, we have constantly found *a first magistrate*, *a head*, *a chief*, under various denominations indeed, and with different degrees of authority, with the title of stadtholder, burgomaster, avoyer, doge, confalloniero, president, syndic, mayor, alcalde, capitaneo, governor, or king: . . . if there is no example in any free government, any more than in those which are not free, of a society without a principal personage, we may fairly conclude, that the body politic cannot subsist without one, any more than the animal body without a head." Equally ubiquitous was "a *senate*, or *little council*, a composition, generally, of those officers of state, who have the most experience and power, and a few other members selected from the highest rank, and most illustrious reputations." Too often, however, these councils shared executive power with the chief magistrate as well as legislative power with a lower assembly, and even took on judicial powers. Wherever senates had exceeded the legislative character of their mission, their members had acquired "an ardent aristocratical ambition, grasping equally at the prerogatives of the first magistrate, and the privileges of the people, and ending in the nobility of a few families, and a tyrannical oligarchy." Only those senates that had been barred from executive power and

confined to legislation had become "firm barriers against the encroachments of the crown, and often great supporters of the liberties of the people." Finally there was a larger assembly, "composed of the body of the people, in some little states; of representatives chosen by the people in others"; or of members chosen more narrowly in more aristocratic states.[44]

Common to all these nations, however much they varied in size and wealth, was "a multitude of curious and ingenious inventions to balance, in their turn, all those powers, to check the passions peculiar to them, and to controul them from rushing into those exorbitancies to which they are most addicted." These devices were necessary because "in every country we have found a variety of *orders*, with very great distinctions." America, however, had an advantage over European republics because it had "different orders of *offices*, but none of *men*; out of office all men are of the same species, and of one blood," a distinction that Turgot had quite ignored when he charged that mixed and balanced governments created distinctions among Americans.[45]

As he surveyed his European republics, however, Adams discerned only one large and wealthy nation, England, which had effectively balanced its various economic interests and social classes to preserve its freedom. The only other republics to achieve this balance were tiny nations set "upon the tops of a few inaccessible mountains, among rocks and precipices, . . . where [the people], living unenvied, in extreme poverty, chiefly upon pasturage, . . . still exhibit the most charming picture of life, and the most dignified character of human nature." In every other European republic except England, the enlargement of territory and the cultivation of the arts, sciences, and commerce had bred an aristocracy that eventually became a tyrannical oligarchy. Yet Adams reasoned that if England could achieve and maintain a republican balance, there was no reason to conclude "that human nature is incapable of liberty, that no honest equality can be preserved in society, and that such forcible causes [of inequality] are always at work as must reduce all men to submission to despotism, monarchy, oligarchy, or aristocracy." America, he argued, proved his point. Briefly comparing the social advantages and political liberties of its independent states point for point with England, to America's distinct advantage, he declared that where these benefits prevailed, "it is unnecessary to add, that the laws alone can govern."[46]

Had Adams ended the *Defence* here, he would have produced a highly original long pamphlet, of about one hundred octavo pages, that quite effectively countered the charges that Count Turgot had leveled against America's constitutions. Even this first and most coherent section of volume 1, however, was weakened, particularly in American eyes, by three surprising defects. First, Adams stepped back from exploring the one European republic he really knew first hand, the United Provinces of the Netherlands. Second, he accorded the English government fulsome praise but no comprehensive analysis. Content to

rely on his early veneration for its constitution and his admiration for Jean De Lolme's analysis of that edifice, he only reluctantly, almost in passing, conceded even the smallest flaws in the government that Britons actually lived under. And in only one brief passage in his "Recapitulation" did he admit that American governments were measurably better than England's. Finally, and most astonishingly, Adams saw no need to present to his readers a coherent analysis of America's new republican constitutions. Instead, beginning with letter XXIV, he plunged into entirely different material to amplify his brief—but no longer quite so brief—against Baron Turgot.

Adams began his long excursion into the political writings of more than a dozen modern and ancient authorities—English, Scottish, French, Italian, Roman, and Greek philosophers and historians—with the same larger goal he had pursued from the first letter of the *Defence*: to demonstrate the necessity of a balanced tripartite government to the survival of any republic. As he proceeded, his argument moved back and forth between extensive quotations, often virtually without comment, and long passages of original material; in letters of the latter character he often ventured into new political territory. This section of eleven letters, to which Charles Francis Adams would add one more (letter LIV) from later in the volume, extended back nearly twenty-two centuries, from Adams's own day to Plato.

He opened with three long letters, entitled "Dr. Swift," "Dr. Franklin," and "Dr. Price." The first is an impressive essay devoted to Adams's deep conviction that "the best legislators of all ages agree in this, that the absolute power . . . is a trust too great to be committed to any one man or assembly; and therefore, in their several institutions of government, power, in the last resort, was always placed by them in balance, among the one, the few, and the many." Nearly the entire text, however, is an unbroken quotation, without quotation marks, from Jonathan Swift's *A Discourse of the Contests and Dissensions between the Nobles and Commons of Athens and Rome, with the Consequences they had upon both those States* (1711), as Adams freely admitted at the letter's end.[47]

Letter XXV, headed "Dr. Franklin," is a different matter entirely. Virtually the entire text of this letter is original, and in addition to furthering his argument for bicameral legislatures, it begins John Adams's exploration of the nature of inequality and aristocracy, a question that would command his increased attention over the next three decades. The letter's title is misleading. Only the first half discusses the alleged political thought of Benjamin Franklin, and Adams seems unable to decide if his venerable diplomatic colleague had been a naive supporter of Pennsylvania's radical unicameral constitution in 1776 (as he would later argue quite consistently) or a wise and subtle advocate of bicameral government. He began by repeating his conviction, stated in letter I, that Turgot was advocating government by a single representative assembly with total legislative power. He immediately connected Franklin with this view but then repeated

a report that Franklin, in Pennsylvania's constitutional convention, had remarked: "Two assemblies appeared to him, like a practice he had somewhere seen, of certain waggoners who, when about to descend a steep hill, with a heavy load, if they had four cattle, took off one pair from before, and chaining them to the hinder part of the wagon, drove them up hill; while the pair before, and the weight of the load, overbalancing the strength of those behind, drew them slowly and moderately down hill." The image is complex and somewhat obscure, and Adams seemed unsure what it said about the Doctor's opinion of a bicameral legislature. But he would use it again in his next letter (XXVI) and then, dramatically much embroidered, some two decades later. In this letter he regarded it as demonstrating the value of bicameralism, and divided wagon teams, in situations of political or topographical extremity and danger, a resource that every republic, and every wagon driver, would need from time to time.[48]

Letter XXV also supplies one of most widely known passages in Adams's *Defence of the Constitutions* (quoted in full in chap. 7, sect. 3), to introduce his first major discussion of aristocracy. Focusing on the government and society he knew best, that of Massachusetts towns, he observed that "the office of justice of the peace, and even the place of representative . . . have generally descended from generation to generation, in three or four families at most." Adams placed this declaration in his discussion of the impossibility of full equality in a republic. He argued that both wealth and birth were and would remain determinants in establishing any social order and any human government, and he defended both "parent honor" and the widespread belief that inequality was in some measure innate. He did not further explore the nature of aristocracy at this point, but he did conclude that a one-house legislature would soon dissolve into three rival parts, returning the political process to that natural division between the One, the Few, and the Many, which unicameral centralizers like Turgot sought to obliterate.[49]

Letter XXVI, entitled "Dr. Price," the longest and most complex of the three letters that open this section, is one of the most important in the entire volume. Its title is even more misleading than the "Dr. Franklin" of letter XXV, because Richard Price appears only late and briefly amid a blizzard of authorities. Adams begins with a discussion of several words and phrases that are central to any consideration of republican government: liberty, law, equal laws, a commonwealth, the general interest, the general will, and his personal favorite, "a government of laws, and not of men." Here he asserts a principle that would inform his essential republican faith until his death. In defending English republican writers—specifically James Harrington and Algernon Sidney—from Turgot's charge that their ideal governments did not guarantee the liberty of every man, Adams declared that their "government of laws and not of men, was intended by them as a description of a commonwealth, not a definition of lib-

erty." John Adams was always concerned for the liberty of every citizen, but the highest objective of his republican statecraft was to create a harmonious commonwealth based on shared values and duties. Looking ahead a few years to the slogan of the French Republic, *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité*, Adams would always argue for the priority of the last value. A sound commonwealth would guarantee to every citizen every liberty that did not interfere with the security and happiness of the whole.[50]

Adams understood that different nations would demonstrate different capacities for reaching this goal. "There can be," he declared, "no way of compelling nations to be more free than they choose to be." Yet there was something that men could do. The great question was,

> What combination of powers in society, or what form of government, will compel the formation of good and equal laws, an impartial execution, and faithful interpretation of them, so that the citizens may constantly enjoy the benefit of them, and be sure of their continuance. The controversy between Mr. Turgot and me is—whether a single assembly of representatives be this form. He maintains the affirmative. I am for the negative: because such an assembly will, upon the first day of its existence, be an aristocracy; in a few days, or years at least, be an oligarchy; and then it will soon divide into two or three parties, who will soon have as many armies."[51]

Adams devoted the remainder of this long letter to a consideration of the innate defects of human nature that made a balanced tripartite government necessary to protect any free society. He began with the assertion that it "is weakness rather than wickedness which renders men unfit to be trusted with unlimited power." This is a distinction of some importance in understanding both John Adams and other Founding Fathers, who have been too often seen as embracing a darker view of human nature than their full testimony, both public and private, will support. Adams, most of his colleagues in Congress, and most of the framers of the federal Constitution, as sons of the Enlightenment, had little sympathy for the chilling theology of many of their ancestors in Europe, Britain, and North America. Their view of man was no longer that of Jonathan Edwards's "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Like many of his Massachusetts neighbors, Adams had turned away from this bleak view of himself and of man some two decades before the Revolution, a view that most British Americans to the south had abandoned much earlier. Unlike many of their evangelically awakened countrymen of the next few generations across much of the rapidly expanding republic, neither Adams nor most of his Revolutionary colleagues would return to this dark faith.[52]

Yet man was undeniably weak, and he expressed his weakness most powerfully in his eagerness to employ every resource that he possessed or could acquire to secure wealth and power. If unchecked, this passion only grew stronger. Here

Adams briefly acknowledged a psychological mystery of human behavior, a mystery he would make some attempt to unravel four years later, in his "Discourses on Davila": "We are not enough acquainted with the physical or metaphysical effects they may have on our bodies and minds, to be able to explain the particular reason why every instance of indulgence strengthens and confirms the subsequent emotions of desire. The cause has been hitherto too deep, remote, and subtle, for the search of corporeal or intellectual microscopes; but the fact is too decided to deceive or escape our observation."[53]

Whatever the forces that created and nourished the human passions might be, limits to those passions must be constructed by organizing society and government so that each man's appetite for power would be checked by the appetites of his neighbors. The ideal commonwealth was not merely an alliance of men for the advancement of their common interests but a contract between them to control their common passions, a conviction that John Adams had expressed in the Preamble to his draft of the Massachusetts Constitution in 1779. To prove the necessity of this control, Adams marshaled a barrage of quotations from a broad spectrum of political authorities, among whom several of the earlier writers held a darker view of human nature than he did. Extending back nearly three centuries from his own day, these authors included Price and Priestley, De Lolme and Beccaria, Montesquieu and La Rochefoucauld, Bolingbroke, Mandeville, Sidney and Hobbes, and his personal favorites, James Harrington and Niccolò Machiavelli. From Harrington he drew the simplest image in favor of bicameral government: two girls facing a delicious cake. To ensure that each got her fair share, they had to agree that one would divide the cake, and the other would chose the slice she preferred. Where Adams used this image in a general way, to demonstrate how a republic could insure fairness between contending classes and interests, Harrington was more specific: the girl who divided was his council or upper house that proposed legislation; the girl who selected was his popular assembly that accepted or rejected what the council proposed.[54]

Adams devoted his next four letters to four early modern political writers he particularly admired. Three of these letters, in which he quoted extensively from Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Harrington, are of the first importance in understanding John Adams's political thought. Entitling this section "Mixed Governments," he selected from each author passages that addressed a single subject: the fusion of the strengths of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy to create a durable republic. Adams made virtually no comment on these texts, but their endorsement of mixed government is clear and unmistakable.[55]

The first letter numbered XXVII consisted of seven unbroken paragraphs from book I, chapter 2, of Niccolò Machiavelli's *Discourses upon the First Ten Books of Livy* (1513). In this brief selection, Machiavelli posits a history of the creation of government from its primitive beginnings; defines monarchy and tyranny, aristocracy and oligarchy, democracy and anarchy; and ties all six forms

of government together in the endless cycle of creation, degeneration, destruction, and rebirth that gave rise to the classical republican tradition. To escape the suffering and chaos of this cycle, several nations, beginning with early Greek city-states, had devised a blending of the three positive forms of government—monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy—into a mixed government. Machiavelli tied the degeneration from each pure political form to its negative correlation—from aristocracy to oligarchy, for example—to the forgetting by each generation of the lessons learned by its predecessor, but argued that by combining the three pure forms into one republican structure, a nation could escape the threat of political instability. And just as Adams would do in the next major section of his *Defence*, on the history of ancient republics, Machiavelli praised Lycurgus's Sparta for its republican durability, blamed Solon for the much shorter life of democratic Athens, and saw Rome as gradually improving from a flawed monarchy, through aristocracy, to a balanced republic.[56]

Letter XXVIII, devoted to book II, chapter 6, of Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* (1748), by far the newest work quoted in this section, supported the same general argument, but in a quite different manner. In constructing tripartite republican governments, Niccolò Machiavelli, James Harrington, and John Adams all based their models on the enduring components of society—the One, the Few, and the Many—and defined the role of each component largely in quantitative terms. Harrington in particular sought to discover the ideal size for senates or councils and the proper property definitions for the larger aristocracy those institutions embodied; he devoted the same care to finding the most effective size of both representative and popular assemblies. Adams, while less concerned with republican numerology than his mentors, always regarded the quantitative dimensions of government and society to be of the first importance.

Montesquieu, however, saw the three ingredients of a sound republic in more functional terms. Both the separation and the balance of powers were as important for him as they were for Machiavelli and Harrington, and for Adams, but his language and thought process differed sharply from that of classical republicanism. The essential components of his ideal government were distinct executive, legislative, and judicial branches. These were not intended either to represent social classes or to express a social reality, but simply to perform particular functions of government. As befitting a member of the *noblesse de la robe*, the judicial elite that filled France's powerful regional *parlements*, the Baron was most concerned to construct a strong judiciary that would be independent of the executive and legislative branches. Moreover, in sharp contrast to Machiavelli and Harrington, Montesquieu appeared to base his government on a largely unarticulated society. While this may seem at odds with his high social position, it was quite in keeping with the dominant political tradition in eighteenth-century France. In the four decades following the appearance of *The*

Spirit of the Laws, the voices of the *philosophes* who saw France as a single, essentially classless society, from Rousseau to Turgot and Condorcet, grew steadily louder and eventually drowned out any sentiment for mixed government. Montesquieu's ideal government, based in part on his admiration for the British constitution, was very different from the French National Assembly of the 1790s, but his tacit acceptance of the reality of an unarticulated society earned the admiration of America's more democratic leaders and sharply limited his appeal for John Adams, who always believed that in their forthright acknowledgment of the One, the Few, and the Many, Machiavelli and Harrington showed a deeper understanding of human society.[57]

Adams's long letter XXIX, on James Harrington, is one of the most important in the *Defence*. Like other letters in this section, it is largely a set of extensive quotations from its subject's principal works, but two features set it apart from the arguments for mixed government that dominate the letters around it. First, Adams opens the letter by returning to the theme of aristocracy, and for the first time in his writings, he begins to dissect this subject into its major parts. The "principles of government," he declares, are of two kinds:

> the principles of authority, and the principles of power. The first are virtues of the mind and heart, such as wisdom, prudence, courage, patience, temperance, justice, &c.: the second are the goods of fortune, such as riches, extraction, knowledge, and reputation. I rank knowledge among the goods of fortune, because it is the effect of education, study, and travel, which are either accidents, or usual effects of riches or birth, and is by no means necessarily connected with wisdom or virtue: but, as it is usually admired and respected by the people, it is clearly a principle of power. The same may be said of reputation, which, abstracted from all consideration whether it is merited or not, well or ill founded, is another source of power.[58]

What Adams is defining here is not some abstract set of "principles of government" but the foundations of political agency that every person who would play a prominent role in government must possess, divided into two broad categories, the first a collection of virtues of the individual will and character, the second those of economic and social accident. These are all, in simpler terms, the bases of aristocracy, the many means that distinguish leaders from followers. First among the "principles of power" is wealth, which Adams ranks above "all the advantages of birth, knowledge, and fame." This brings him to the second point that opens up new territory, James Harrington's thesis that "empire [i.e., the power at the heart of any government] follows the balance of property."[59]

The remainder of this letter is given over to extensive quotations from Harrington's *Oceana* (1656) and a defense of that work, his *Prerogative of Popular Government*, interspersed with brief corroborations by Francis Bacon and Aristotle, to show that whatever class of men held the balance of landed wealth in

any nation must hold that nation's balance of political power. From this perspective, Harrington viewed the utter despotism of the Ottoman Empire, where all land was held by the sultan; aristocratic rule in many countries, where a relatively small class of men held most of the land; and oligarchies in less fortunate nations, where that wealthy class was so small that its members had become arrogant and uncontrollable. More democratic nations had achieved a stable balance of power only when a large number of people possessed at least some landed wealth. "In America," Adams added, in an aside that uncharacteristically deemphasized the role of aristocracy in his own country, "the balance is nine-tenths on the side of the people: indeed there is but one order; and our senators have influence chiefly by the principles of authority [i.e., their individual talents and virtues], and very little by those of power [i.e., their wealth and birth]; but this must be postponed." Thus, once again, as at the end of his letter XIX (on the Netherlands) and in letter XX (on England), he turned away from a fuller discussion of one of the few nations that he knew by direct observation, here his native land, and in his next letter (XXX) he plunged back two millennia to the Roman Republic.[60]

The next three letters (XXX–XXXII) center on the political structure of the Roman Republic in the period when it first rose to dominate the Mediterranean world. Adams's central authority here is Polybius, the preeminent historian of the second century BCE. In appraising this writer, he presses his exploration of the classical republican tradition almost to its origins. Polybius was the vital link between the earliest Greek theorists of republicanism and its most prominent Roman chronicler, Livy, who in turn passed the tradition on to Machiavelli. A comparison of the first letter numbered XXVII, on Machiavelli, and letter XXX, which is almost entirely devoted to extended passages from Polybius, unmistakably establishes the connection. Polybius begins with the same triad of pure political forms, each paired with its degenerate counterpart: monarchy and tyranny, aristocracy and oligarchy, and democracy and anarchy. He then explains the principle of uniting the three pure forms into one balanced whole, attributes the discovery of this balance to Lycurgus of Sparta, and proceeds to praise republican Rome as the finest embodiment of this principle. Only two elements are lacking to make Polybius a perfect Machiavellian—in the republican sense of that commonly corrupted epithet. Polybius lacks Machiavelli's sense of an endless cycle of republican birth, decline, destruction, and rebirth and has no appreciation for the importance of quantitative balance, which would deeply fascinate Machiavelli and come almost to obsess James Harrington.[61]

John Adams sensed the second difference at once, and in letters XXXI and XXXII, he criticized Polybius and other ancient authorities for portraying Rome as a model republic. Polybius had argued that Rome blended the three pure political forms by annually electing two consuls with monarchical powers,

creating a large aristocratic senate, and giving the people two tribunes who could block senatorial resolves and force an appeal to popular assemblies whenever they thought the people's interests were threatened. But Adams saw this as a most unbalanced republic. The consuls had no veto to protect executive authority, and the people would meet only occasionally, leaving the senate as the dominant body in a thoroughly aristocratic republic.[62]

Finally, John Adams tackled Plato. In his long letter XXXIII, he did not contend that the Athenian was either a founder or an important theorist of the classical tripartite republic, and if he had really felt, in the winter of 1784–85, that Plato was his "favorite author," as Abigail then claimed, he had evidently lost some of his fascination two years later. Adams had no interest in the theory of philosopher kings—the very antithesis of the classical republican tradition—and later in the *Defence* he declared that "some parts of Plato . . . are as wild as the ravings of Bedlam." But he could hardly ignore the author of the *Republic*. Plato was the first writer in any culture to compare and appraise in detail all the varied structures of government known to him. For John Adams, however, he was something more—the first writer to characterize the kind of citizen who would be attracted to, live in, and be shaped by each kind of government. Nearly two millennia later, a man who had just played a major role in a political revolution, had formulated a major constitution during that event, and was now defending the form of republic that he had advocated and devised found Plato's attempt to connect government with social character of the greatest interest.[63]

Adams begins by summarizing, at face value, Plato's claims for his government of philosopher kings, apparently accepting as valid every virtue that the Athenian itemized for his ideal city in book IV of the *Republic*. Plato's vision, emphasizing civic virtue, broad education, and an organic unity among all social classes, was immensely appealing to Adams; the language of his summary is reminiscent of the idealism of the young author of *A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* twenty-one years earlier. Yet Adams knew this government was incurably tainted by the "mystical whimsies which we meet with so often in Plato," and so he turned to the philosopher's more "intelligible" and "profound" knowledge of other forms of government.[64]

Plato believed that "there are as many species of soul as there are of republics: five of each," and after presenting in great detail the first, that of his philosopher kings, he described the other four, and their natural progression from one to another. These were the Spartan or ambitious republic, an aristocratic regime based on honor but prone to internal contentions and frequent wars; the oligarchic republic, a cruel domination by the rich over the poor; democracy, a riot of popular self-indulgence and the spurning of all laws; and finally, tyranny, the ruthless suppression of the Many by the One. Plato's political characters were based squarely on a view of human nature that was more pessimistic than

Adams's own, with men corrupted at every stage of the political cycle—from arrogance, to avarice, to a total lack of self-restraint, and finally to a submission to absolute authority. His solution was a radical program of education that would produce virtuous guardians, philosopher kings, who would interrupt the vicious cycle and usher in an era of virtue throughout the republic. Adams had less faith in the power of education to effect this change, as he would declare in his "Discourses on Davila" and in his correspondence with Samuel Adams four years later, but Plato's larger argument effectively supported his own political beliefs. Because the Athenian had demonstrated that no one kind of republic (except his unattainable philosophic city) could create respect for the laws, Adams felt richly confirmed in his conviction that a stable republic must blend the different orders or types of men—proud aristocrats, avaricious oligarchs, the unruly commons, and that one exceptional man who might at any time seize total power—into one carefully balanced whole.[65]

Adams ended his presentation of the arguments of political philosophers and historians for mixed government by returning to the early modern period. Letter XXXIV opens with a brief tribute to Sir Thomas Smith, a Tudor scholar and statesman who capped his long career with a treatise that Adams referred to as "The Commonwealth of England." He praised this work because it was written "not as Plato made his Republic, Xenophon his Kingdom of Persia, or Sir Thomas Moore his Utopia, feigned commonwealths, such as never were nor shall be, vain imaginations, phantasies of philosophers, but as England stood, and was governed at that day." He then confessed that, although Smith discussed monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, "as there is nothing remarkable, either in favour of our system [i.e., of mixed government] or against it, I should not have quoted the book in this place, but for the sake of its title. The constitution of England is in truth a republic, and has ever been so considered by foreigners, and by the most learned and enlightened Englishmen, although the word commonwealth has become unpopular and odious, since the unsuccessful and injudicious attempts to abolish monarchy and aristocracy, between the years 1640 and 1660."[66]

Here Adams made an interesting error. Smith's work, "considered the most important description of the constitution and government of England written in the Tudor age," was actually entitled *De Republica Anglorum; the Maner of Governement or Policie of the Realm of England* (1583). Adams had conflated this work with Smith's earlier *Discourse of the Commonweal* (1581), a study of England's economy, not its government. Had he known the real title of Smith's political work, it would have made his argument even stronger but would not have fundamentally altered it. From the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy in England in 1660 to the publication of John Adams's *Defence of the Constitutions* in the 1780s, two words were anathema in the political discourse of the British establishment: commonwealth and republic.[67]

Adams's extended treatment of some twenty modern and ancient political philosophers and historians is the most valuable section of his *Defence of the Constitutions*, despite the misleading titles of some of its letters and the somewhat confusing order of its materials. Here, as nowhere else in all his published work, one gets a concise idea of what Adams had learned about republican government from the writers whom he most respected. Not all his selected authors contributed equally and consistently to his argument for an organic republic that balanced the One, the Few, and the Many. Franklin's view of a bicameral legislature was somewhat unclear; Polybius accepted as balanced a Roman Republic that was essentially an aristocracy; and Plato sought to overcome the vicious cycle of progression from one imperfect form of government to another by education alone. Among the moderns, Baron Montesquieu was somewhat of an outlier for Adams because his conception of the three branches of government, although based in part on his admiration for the British constitution, did not view these branches as expressing the powers of different social orders but only as embodying the three essential functions of government: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial. But most of Adams's authors, notably Swift, De Lolme, Machiavelli, and Harrington, took as their principal position of political architecture that only a balance of social orders, based on a clear view of the balance of landed wealth in any society, could achieve stability.

The last major section of Adams's first volume was a review of more than a dozen ancient republics. Longer than the treatment of contemporary European republics that opened his argument, it was broadly organized on the same general principle, with each republic classified as "monarchical," "aristocratical," or "democratical," but less effectively in two respects. First, Adams jumbled up his plan by beginning with one democracy, then one aristocracy, followed by four letters on monarchical republics and one more on another aristocracy, before considering seven democracies, then one more aristocracy, and finally three more democracies. Second, living in an age when the systematic study of government in the ancient world was in its infancy and confining himself to a cursory reading of the standard classics, he made numerous errors of fact and interpretation, both large and small.[68]

Adams's nominal topic, republican government in the ancient world, was not a small one in the eighteenth century and has since become much larger. There were hundreds of city-states of every size, primarily in Greece, whose governments followed some variation of this form; most were aristocracies or oligarchies, but several were democracies of some distinction. Adams, however, formally designated only three governments as aristocratic: pre-republican Rome (letter XXXVI); Lacedaemon [Sparta] (letter XL); and Crotona [Kroton] in southern Italy (letter XLIX). His handful of monarchical republics in Tacitus's Germany (letter XXXVII) and Homeric Greece (letters XXXVIII and XXXIX) bore so little resemblance to either of the two constitutional

monarchies—England and Poland—he had considered in contemporary Europe that they rendered this novel category even more problematical. Finally, his three aristocracies were indeed aristocratic, but so were some of the states he formally labeled as democracies, notably Carthage (letter XXXV), Corinth, which was often under the rule of a tyrant (letter XXXXV), and republican Rome (letter LII).[69]

For readers who had little critical sense of ancient Greek and Roman history, which was nearly everyone in the eighteenth century, Adams's general arguments for the inherent superiority of mixed governments, the tendency of unbalanced aristocracies to degenerate into oligarchies, and the utter impossibility of democracy as a foundation for strong and durable government would have been broadly persuasive. But as part of a guidebook for republican legislators, which both Thomas Jefferson and C. Bradley Thompson have seen as a crucial role for the *Defence*, this long section is woefully deficient.[70] Its discussions of aristocracy are too brief, and its treatment of both executive authority and the popular element in ancient republics, particularly in Rome (letters XXXVI and LII), is too shallow to be of much use. Its greatest historical defect, however, is its treatment of ancient Athens, in one of the volume's longest letters.

Letter XLII of the *Defence* is simply a mess. It confounds sheer mythology, traditional legend, and real history, attributes important political events to men who had no share in them, and omits the real contributions of others. Its most serious error, however, was to fundamentally mischaracterize nearly every feature of Athenian democracy. In attributing the introduction of that democracy to Solon, Adams predated its origin by nearly a century. Thereafter, he occasionally characterizes a prominent Athenian as a haughty aristocrat or an amoral demagogue but gives no account of the city's policies under democracy or of the major events of that era (508 to 322 BCE), which included two triumphs over invading Persians, an ignominious defeat by Sparta, and a surprisingly swift recovery. He quite ignores Athens's astonishing achievements in drama, historical prose, political philosophy, and oratory, all of which occurred entirely under its democracy. Finally, he says nothing whatever about the military suppression of Athenian independence, first by Philip of Macedon, and thereafter by the generals who succeeded Alexander the Great. This leaves the impression, which Adams surely intended, that Athenian democracy had failed, as he believed all democracies must fail, due solely to the inherent impossibility of its form of government.[71]

In editing Adams's *Defence of the Constitutions* sixty-five years later, when the United States, the world's largest democratic republic, was deeply challenged by growing sectional strains over slavery, but had just defeated Mexico and seized control of a sizable portion of the Pacific coast, his grandson felt obligated to correct several of his erroneous criticisms of Athenian democracy by

citing recent British and German scholarship. In the *Defence*, this letter's weaknesses were hardly exceptional; several of those surrounding it on other ancient republics, whether by their errors or simple lack of substance, were equally useless as a historical guide for modern lawmakers. Yet in partaking of the common conviction that a true democracy, even in a relatively small area among a limited population, simply could not be a successful government, an article of faith among most learned men on either side of the Atlantic, John Adams missed a political parallel close at hand.[72]

Classical Athens was in fact a real democracy, and contrary to the belief of eighteenth-century gentlemen and scholars, it was exceptionally stable, remarkably prosperous, and astonishingly creative. Its loss of independence after almost two centuries of nearly unbroken civic health was primarily due not to internal political weakness but to the overwhelming military power of Macedonia, the first of several empires that would dominate all of Greece for the next two millennia. Athens did not resemble any modern democracy: it had a large slave population; it confined citizenship to native-born males; it filled nearly all political offices by lot rather than by popular elections; and it passed all laws in frequent massive assemblies of all its citizens, the very type of legislature that Adams thought was impossible. It also made demands on its citizens' time and energies that few modern populations would tolerate. Finally, Athens's ill-deserved but notorious reputation for instability and anarchy was so widespread that when early modern democracy finally did emerge in the late eighteenth century, first in Britain's rebelling North American colonies and next in Holland and France, and then spread widely in the Americas and western Europe across the nineteenth century, it owed no readily apparent debt to the ancient city.[73]

Yet had Adams been better informed about Athenian democracy, he might have sensed the full force of its challenge to his argument that the only viable republics were based on popular elections, representative bicameral legislatures embodying different social orders, and a balance of executive and legislative powers, and discreetly ignored the whole subject. The irony here is the structural resemblance of Greek democracies to New England towns. In the 1760s, Adams's native town of Braintree, extending over fifty square miles with some twenty-five hundred inhabitants engaged primarily in agriculture, but with some commerce on a sheltered seacoast, was of a similar size and economic character to dozens if not hundreds of Greek city-states. As a political entity, with its assembly (town meeting) open only to adult males, nearly all native to the town (although, unlike in Greece, they were not required to be), its structure was not very different from that of some smaller Greek democracies.[74]

Athens, one of the largest Greek city-states in area, and perhaps the largest in population, was quite different from Braintree; it was far more commercial and had far more slaves. It was also the largest and most durable democracy in

the Greek world. Its success belies Adams's contention that democracy could survive only in tiny agrarian communities on obscure mountaintops, like San Marino. Geographically, Athens quite resembled Rhode Island: it was almost exactly the same size; both were quite commercial with extensive seacoasts, but with many inhabitants living in small agrarian villages or on nearby small farms; and both had sizable slave populations. With its much greater population, however, Athens was more like late eighteenth-century Massachusetts. It was able to devise and maintain a direct democracy, with frequent mass assemblies, for a population that was probably somewhat larger, but more densely concentrated, than that of Massachusetts's four most commercial seaboard counties. There were and still are limits of scale to direct (nonrepresentative) democracy; it is hard to imagine it working effectively in a much larger territory, across a much larger population, than Athens (roughly 1,100 square miles, with some 250,000 inhabitants, and at times considerably more). Such a government was indeed impractical across the broader stretches of the new American republic. But it was perhaps John Adams's good fortune that he did not understand Athenian democracy. Had he understood it, his only wise course, in making his larger argument, would have been to give the city a wide berth.[75]

John Adams's vigorous dismissal of Athenian democracy was hardly exceptional in eighteenth-century political discourse, but however common his attitude, it was ironic for a New Englander, and for an American Revolutionary writer it was both inappropriate and unwise. His misattribution of the founding of Athenian democracy to Solon, shared by other republican writers of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, including Machiavelli, was relatively unimportant, but his utter misunderstanding of that democracy either contributed to or at the least confirmed a denigration of that political form for which he had briefly shown a greater appreciation before the Revolution. That denigration would play a role in damaging the reputation of the *Defence* in America, beginning with the publication of its first volume in 1787 and continuing to the present day.[76]

Adams's survey of ancient republics, despite its considerable length, was the least valuable part of the *Defence* to readers who sought a deeper understanding of the workings of republican government and was probably the least satisfying to others who merely sought entertainment from Adams's historical romance. His letters that dealt with the Roman Republic, both those near the end of his treatment of ancient authorities (letters XXX–XXXII) and two in his section on ancient republics (XXXVI and LII), were quite perceptive. He immediately understood that despite the claims of Polybius, the Roman Republic was a most unbalanced aristocracy and could not serve as a model for modern republics. But his other letters on ancient city-states were useless, too brief, shallow, and inaccurate to prove the single point he stressed in each, as he did in nearly every letter in the *Defence*: the necessity of a tripartite mixed government for every

republic that hoped to long endure. His letter on Athens was the worst of the lot, in part because he was more eager to discredit direct democracy than to understand an unusually complex political structure that, in fairness to him, few if any scholars in the eighteenth century understood well. But having finally disposed of the ancient republics to his satisfaction, John Adams could return to more congenial territory to conclude his lengthy volume.

Adams's three concluding letters were all quite different from each other. He opened the first (LIII) with a passage that concisely summarized the principal lessons of all fifty-two letters that preceded it:

> By the authorities and examples already recited, you will be convinced, that three branches of power have an unalterable foundation in nature; that they exist in every society natural and artificial; and that if all of them are not acknowledged in any constitution of government, it will be found to be imperfect, unstable, and soon enslaved; that the legislative and executive authorities are naturally distinct; and that liberty and the laws depend entirely on a separation of them in the frame of government: that the legislative power is naturally and necessarily sovereign and supreme over the executive; and therefore that the latter must be made an essential branch of the former, even with a negative, or it will not be able to defend itself, but will be soon invaded, undermined, attacked, or in some way or other totally ruined and annihilated by the former.

He then stated: "This is applicable to every state in America, in its individual capacity; but," he asked, "is it equally applicable to the United States in their federal capacity?"[77]

Adams's answer was surprisingly tentative for a political thinker of such spirited and often contentious character. Dr. Price, the Abbé de Mably, and Baron Turgot had all criticized America's Articles of Confederation for establishing a national government that was too weak to survive. Yet Adams, perhaps mindful of his own difficulties with Congress from 1779 to 1783, was uncertain how much additional power the states should surrender to that body to make a stronger union. He did understand, however, that the American Congress, despite certain legislative powers, was not a true legislature. Its members represented neither regular voters nor Lockean constituents, but sovereign state governments, any one of which could refuse its assent to the will of the congressional majority and thereby bring important operations to a standstill. In letter LIII, in the one passage in the *Defence* that his friend Thomas Jefferson explicitly criticized after his first reading, Adams remarked that Congress "is not a legislative assembly, nor a representative assembly, but only a diplomatic assembly." On this point, Adams effectively anticipated a modern understanding of the Confederation Congress. It was a central achievement of the Philadelphia Convention in 1787 to turn this "diplomatic assembly" into a truly representative legislature.[78]

Letter LIV, a critique of constitutional plans proposed by John Locke, John Milton, and David Hume, seemed so out of place in a conclusion to the volume that Charles Francis Adams moved it back, in his 1851 edition of the *Defence*, to follow the text of letter XXXIV, which had closed his grandfather's treatment of ancient and modern writers. But while letter LIV is indeed a sharp detour from Adams's concluding thoughts, it is equally anomalous in C. F. Adams's preferred location. Unlike every authority discussed in letters XXIV to XXXIV, Locke, Milton, and Hume had attracted Adams's attention because they proved a similar point: "Chimerical systems of legislation are neither new nor uncommon, even among men of the most resplendent genius and extensive learning." He then summarized the three systems to show what unbalanced, overly theoretical models, based simply on whim, self-interest, or pure reason, rather than on nature (i.e., experience), might look like. In choosing John Locke's 1663 plan of government for Carolina, he was hardly being fair; his grandson suggested that Locke was simply trying to please that colony's aristocratic proprietors. Milton's unicameral seventeenth-century legislature and Hume's aristocratic eighteenth-century parliament were more characteristic of their thought. All three models violated nearly every principle of government that Adams stated in the opening of his letter LIII. But having shown how mistaken even the best political writers could be, Adams was free to finish up his work.[79]

Letter LV, dated 21 December 1786 and entitled "Conclusion," is not a summary of the preceding letters, but a real conclusion, that is, a direct result of Adams's argument that a single legislature, unchecked and unaided by either an independent executive or an independent judiciary, could never be the basis of a stable and successful republican government. To illustrate this claim, Adams systematically imagines the work of a national legislature constructed on Baron Turgot's principles. This body, vested with a nation's full political powers, would have to perform all the necessary functions of government. It must, of course, make all appointments to office, both civil and military and, in doing so, must deal with the conflicting demands of the nation's various regions, social classes, and political leaders. There would be no king, president, council, or senate, either to nominate any officers or to provide a refining judgment for the assembly's choice. Diplomats, too, would need appointing. And because there would be no independent judiciary, the assembly would have to appoint all judges and be prepared to consider many appeals from the decisions of those judges. These varied and complex tasks, Adams predicted, would soon tie up the assemblymen in endless petty quarrels, even before they got to the time-consuming work of the one duty that no assembly could avoid, legislation.[80]

Two principal anxieties shaped Adams's concluding argument. The first was that in a unicameral government the process of making appointments, especially to the army, would elevate aristocratic pretensions. Here one can sense his fear that a widely respected military commander would influence the assembly

to create a military aristocracy; one may easily imagine Adams eying the specter of General Washington overawing the Congress of the young republic. The second fear, that the legislature would be reduced by these burdens to quarrelsome impotence, sounds like Adams's personal reminiscence of his service in Congress and of his frustrations with that body as a diplomat. He specifically identifies the experience of America's provincial congresses, which from 1774 to 1776 bore the total burden of government in several colonies, and of which Adams himself had briefly been a member in Massachusetts, as proof of this danger.[81]

But Adams concluded this discouraging assessment with a consoling thought, followed by an exhortation to his countrymen. The American people, "living chiefly by agriculture, in small numbers, sprinkled over large tracts of land," had the advantage of a quiet time to contemplate and meet the challenge of republican government. What was of the greatest importance was

> to begin well; misarrangements now made, will have great, extensive, and distant consequences; and we are now employed, how little soever we may think of it, in making establishments which will affect the happiness of an hundred millions of inhabitants at a time, in a period not very distant. All nations, under all governments, must have parties; the great secret is to control them: there are but two ways, either by a monarchy and standing army, or by a balance in the constitutions. Where the people have a voice, and there is no balance, there will be everlasting fluctuations, revolutions, and horrors, until a standing army, with a general at its head, commands the peace, or the necessity of an equilibrium is made appear to all, and is adopted by all.[82]

In late December 1786, under pressure from his printer to complete the *Defence*, Adams decided to forgo a holiday excursion to Bath with his wife, daughter, and son-in-law; while they traveled and relaxed, he remained at the American legation and drafted a substantial preface to his work. This introduction opened with an astonishing assertion for the author of the *Defence of the Constitutions*. Adams began by lamenting that while human knowledge over the past three centuries had advanced so remarkably in many fields, "the knowledge of the principles and construction of free governments . . . have remained at a full stand for two or three thousand years"; the "nature of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy" were as well understood at the time of the Persian emperor Darius (500 BCE) "as they are at this hour." Indeed, there had been only three important political discoveries since the Spartan legislator Lycurgus (c. eighth century BCE): representation; the separation of executive, legislative, and judicial powers; and (Adams's personal favorite) the tripartite balance of three independent branches of the legislature. These three principles, of course, whether asserted or contested, formed the vital core of constitutional thought from Plato and Aristotle, through Polybius and Livy, to Machiavelli, Harrington, Locke,

and John Adams himself—that is to say, virtually the entire substance of the volume he was introducing to the reader.[83]

But after a brief digression to recite the disastrous carnage of the revolutions that roiled the unbalanced city-states of Greece, drawn from Thucydides and from David Hume's *On the Populousness of Ancient Nations*, Adams got down to business. The American states, he explained, with their rapidly growing populations, had understood the need for stronger and more balanced governments, with independent democratic branches to counter the forces of aristocracy. They also understood that their most prominent men must be "separated from the mass, and placed by themselves in a senate," a move that was "to all honest and useful intents, an ostracism." The Americans had arranged their entire political structures—their democratic assemblies, aristocratic senates, and independent executives—in "the first example of governments erected on the simple principles of nature" and owed their sound governments to the exercise of that same "reason and the senses," that same simplicity and enlightenment of the people, that had informed their recent achievements in many fields of knowledge.[84]

Adams then took just two pages to explain his objective in writing the *Defence*. Because he had known the men who perfected the new state governments (he modestly chose not to say that he had been one of those men), he had determined "to lay before the gentleman to whom they are addressed, a specimen of that kind of reading and reasoning which produced the American constitutions." To effect this work, the American people had "adopted the method of a wise architect, in erecting a new palace for the residence of his sovereign," by consulting past examples and authorities. He closed by praising England for developing the idea of constitutional balance nearly to perfection, and he asserted that the tribes of the ancient Germans and North America's Indians had also understood the principles of balance but had failed to adapt their original systems to the changes that occurred in the ensuing centuries.[85]

5. Volumes 2 and 3

The second and third volumes of the *Defence of the Constitutions* were a sharp contrast to the first. It is unclear exactly when or why Adams decided to write them; we know only that he finished volume 1 on New Year's Day 1787 and was at work on volume 2 by March. Once he began, he wrote—and copied—fairly steadily until he had completed enough text to fill that volume (published in London in August 1787) and then proceeded straight on to volume 3. He may have substantially completed its text by October, but he did not date his conclusion until late December. This final volume appeared in January 1788, shortly before he returned to America. Nearly everything about the later volumes, except their overarching thesis, the necessity of tripartite republican government, is different from volume 1. While that earlier work is some three-quarters direct quotation, marked and unmarked, quotation fills nearly nine-tenths of volume 2

(but only one-half of volume 3). And volume 2 has a single broad historical subject, "Italian Republics of the Middle Age," which Adams extended into volume 3.[86]

In volume 1, Adams had considered some three-dozen republics, modern and ancient, of widely varying character, from the shores of the eastern Mediterranean Sea to Europe's Atlantic coast. In volumes 2 and 3, however, perhaps mindful of how cavalierly he had dealt with so many important governments in volume 1, he traced the history of just eight republics, usually devoting one "letter," no matter how long, to each republic. All these city-states had arisen in northern Italy in the medieval period, most were fairly well known, and all had been transformed into or defeated and absorbed by a few large duchies during or shortly after the Renaissance, leaving only three other sizable Italian republics, Genoa, Lucca, and Venice, which Adams had briefly considered in volume 1, to survive much weakened to the end of the eighteenth century. Adams shaped the story of each of the eight medieval republics as a tragic failure to understand and implement the tripartite balance of political powers and social orders that he had favored from the outset, and he centered his treatment of each republic on its most prominent local historians, from the well known, most notably Machiavelli, to the fairly obscure. As he quoted nearly his entire text directly from these historians and marshaled those quotations to make the same arguments that he had advanced in volume 1, these "letters" need not detain us any longer than they did Adams's eighteenth-century readers, who appear to have largely ignored the later volumes.[87]

In 1788, shortly after his return to America, Adams remarked to Dr. Benjamin Rush that he was "most anxious" to hear how the third volume of his *Defence* was received because "it was the boldest and freest and most likely to be unpopular." And, indeed, his spirited attack on Marchamont Nedham's *The Excellency of a Free State, or the Right Constitution of a Commonwealth* (1656), which took up more than half of that volume, was among his most polemical political works. Charles Francis Adams plausibly speculates that Adams's assault on Nedham came about by a mere accident; in January 1787, Adams's good friend, the ardent republican Brand Hollis, had sent him an eighteenth-century republication of Nedham's tract. But Adams's zeal in tackling the argument in *The Excellency of a Free State* is not hard to understand.[88]

Published in the same year as James Harrington's *Oceana* (and John Milton's *Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*, which Adams had criticized in volume 1), *The Excellency of a Free State* was the work of a notoriously polemical journalist in the pay of England's Commonwealth and Protectorate governments for more than a decade. Assembling his text from several of his essays that first appeared in his journal, the *Mercurius Politicus*, Nedham espoused ideas that were completely at odds with those of Adams's favorite English political author. Nedham ignored the classical republican tradition that

Harrington so revered, utterly rejected a balanced tripartite republic, and defended a single popular assembly as the proper government for England. He opened with the declaration that "the people, that is, such as shall be successively chosen to represent the people, are the best keepers of their own liberties, and that for many reasons."[89]

In the ensuing tract, Nedham expounded fourteen reasons for his contention, followed by a half dozen objections, which he answered one by one, and then by nine "errors in ancient Christian policy," and five "cautions to the people." John Adams carefully considered all thirty-four elements of Nedham's argument and thereby produced the most formally organized long work of his career. As in volume 1 of the *Defence*, however, his execution of his counterattack was marred by haste, and his grandson, in editing the essay for publication in Adams's *Works*, found it necessary to insert brief labels to identify several of the "errors" and "rules" on which his grandfather was commenting and to move up one large section of text to group the commentary on Nedham's objections in proper order.[90]

The essence of Adams's argument, however, was straightforward. Nedham contended that "the people" were the best keepers of their liberties because they best understood their interests and had the least temptation to corruption or any form of self-interest. As C. Bradley Thompson has summarized Nedham's argument, the people could most effectively preserve their liberties because they were uniquely responsible for defending them. Adams responded that the unarticulated mass of the people, represented solely by a large unicameral assembly such as Baron Turgot had endorsed, without either an executive or any recognized form of aristocracy to limit their behavior, would quickly divide into factions; that individual citizens, and representatives, would seek the advancement of their faction against all others; and that competing aristocracies of power would soon emerge.[91]

Toward the end of his long "letter," in a stylistic departure from all his previous work, Adams set forth thirteen numbered propositions, which may be reduced to one coherent argument: that democracy never did or could exist because the people never had or would ever have any love for either democracy or equality, but only a love for themselves and their political allies, whether they were in the majority or the minority. From these universal feelings, all social division and discord would arise. To prove these points, Adams leveled a barrage of historical narrative and analysis, drawn primarily from Roman history, at every contention that Nedham had advanced. The solution to this universal condition was, and could only be, the classical tripartite republic espoused by Niccolò Machiavelli, refined by James Harrington, and defended to his countrymen in three long volumes by John Adams.[92]

Having finally exhausted—or been exhausted by—his critique of Marchamont Nedham, Adams ended his third volume with a brief conclusion,

dated 26 December 1787, that made almost no reference to any part of the *Defence*. Instead, he apologized for not continuing the work he had done on the Italian republics by examining the medieval governments of "Goths, Saracens, and bigoted Christians," and those other republics of "Castile, Arragon, Catalonia, Gallicia, and all the others in Spain," as well as many more in France, Germany, and virtually every other European nation. He conceded that such work would be worthy of human endeavor, but he believed it would not be encouraged, "for mankind in general dare not as yet read or think upon CONSTITUTIONS." Moreover, Adams knew that such a work was "too extensive for my forces"; what he had already done had been written and published in such haste that "it stands in need of an apology."[93]

Yet Adams was convinced that however many governments and republics he might examine, they would all be "agitated by the same passions"; "the principles developed in these Letters will go a great way in explaining every phaenomenon that occurs in the history of government." Nations, like plants and animals, "move by unalterable rules: and education, discipline, and laws, make the greatest difference in their accomplishments, happiness, and perfection." He then turned to America, where the work of his countrymen in perfecting government was still incomplete, but "impartial justice will confess, that it is astonishing they have been able to do so much." He ended this passage with an exhortation to young Americans to take up the unfinished task.[94]

Almost immediately thereafter, in the midst of musing on the greater effect of sound constitutions than of a salubrious climate, or even of individual virtue, in determining human happiness, he suddenly broke off, to introduce some important news: "It is now in our power to bring this work to a conclusion with unexpected dignity. In the course of the last summer, two authorities have appeared, greater than any that have been before quoted, in which the principles we have attempted to defend have been acknowledged. The first is an Ordinance of Congress [i.e., the Northwest Ordinance]; the second is, the Report of the Convention at Philadelphia [i.e., the United States Constitution]." Then, following a brief explanation of the inadequacy of the young nation's well-intentioned Articles of Confederation, he concluded with his assessment of the Constitution.

> [This] new system, which seems admirably calculated to unite [the Americans'] interests and affections, and bring them to an uniformity of principles and sentiments, is equally well combined to unite their wills and forces as a single nation. A result of accommodation cannot be supposed to reach the ideas of perfection of any one; but the conception of such an idea, and the deliberate union of so great and various a people in such a plan, is, without all partiality or prejudice, if not the greatest exertion of human understanding, the greatest single effort of national deliberation that the world has ever seen.

> That it may be improved is not to be doubted, and provision is made for that purpose in the Report itself. A people who could conceive, and can adopt it, we need not fear will be able to amend it, when, by experience, its inconveniences and imperfections shall be seen and felt.

Thus John Adams ended his third and final volume of the *Defence of the Constitutions* much as he had ended his first, looking to a future in which the American people enjoyed the power and wisdom to perfect their governments.[95]

6. The Initial Reception of the *Defence*

Adams had not directed his *Defence of the Constitutions* toward any one audience, but beyond his general anxiety over the political state of the new American nation and his immediate concern for Massachusetts as it coped with Shays's Rebellion, he did have three politically troubled European nations, Holland, Ireland, and France, much in mind as he began his work. The vigorous suppression of the Patriot Party in the Netherlands by the Prussian army in 1787 and the crushing of the forces for independence in Ireland by the British army in the early 1790s dampened any immediate appeal of his argument in those unhappy countries. France was a different story.[96]

The failing French monarchy made no attempt to ban John Adams's work, and for several years after the appearance of his first volume, he did have French admirers. But the *Defence* faced insuperable obstacles in Paris, both before and after 1789. Its principal argument explicitly opposed the dominant French enthusiasm for a highly centralized unicameral government, so evident in the thought of Rousseau, of Condorcet, and of the *Defence*'s named antagonist, Baron Turgot. After he left France in 1785, Adams had but one important political friend in Paris, Thomas Jefferson. Immediately upon reading the first volume of the *Defence* in 1787, Jefferson warmly expressed his approval to Adams, but his friends in France soon convinced him that the work could only have a pernicious effect on the efforts at reform that were taking shape as their nation was about to choose the Estates General, its first real legislature in over a century. They finally persuaded Jefferson to support their efforts to block a French edition of the *Defence* (while keeping Adams in the dark). The first French translation of the *Defence*, which omitted all the material on the Italian republics in the second and third volumes, did not appear until 1792. By that date the early leaders of the French Revolution had thoroughly branded John Adams an "Angloman," a hopeless votary of the royal British constitution and a blind imitator of the Anglophile writer, Jean De Lolme. Thereafter, Adams's *Defence* was anathema south of the English Channel.[97]

Its cool reception in Europe left the *Defence* just one venue, the young American republic. Its mixed reception there in the late 1780s and into the 1790s, a major factor in the further development of Adam's political thought, and of his

political career, will play a featured role in the following chapter, but this is an appropriate place to ask what he intended to achieve in writing the *Defence*, and what he did in fact achieve.

In the *Defence*, John Adams appeared to have two large objectives. First, he hoped to convince readers in Holland, France, Ireland, and America, by the massive presentation of both literary and historical examples drawn from two millennia of political experience, that any republic that chose to centralize all its powers—executive, legislative, and judicial—in one unicameral chamber could not survive as a free government but must soon degenerate into a tyranny backed by a standing army. Second, there is some evidence that Adams designed his enormous work not simply to persuade his readers to support tripartite republican governments but to offer them practical guidance, drawn from both history and literature, in reforming the governments under which they lived. Both intentions were largely frustrated. The French rejected both his argument and his guidance. The Dutch and the Irish were too oppressed to benefit from his efforts. Many Americans also resisted his message, but for a different reason. By 1787–88 they had already constructed several tripartite state governments and were just in the process of creating another for the entire nation. Beginning in the early 1780s, however, the intellectual—and emotional—basis of the separation and balance of powers in those governments had become quite different from that of John Adams. Most of his countrymen were now largely uninterested in making their state governments, and particularly their executives, any stronger, and many were skeptical that Adams, who had been such a powerful counselor on the floor of Congress, in Massachusetts's constitutional convention, and in print in the 1770s, had anything more to teach them.

In terms of John Adams's own political thought, however, his *Defence of the Constitutions* was a major achievement; it considerably advanced his ideas along their increasingly distinctive path. Before the *Defence*, he had briefly expressed his belief in several of the major points that he would make in his three volumes, but he had seldom presented them at length or defended them with either historical examples or explicit appeals to highly regarded political writers. In the *Defence* he did both, on a scale that was unprecedented in American political writing. The greater part of the text in his first and third volumes, and nearly the entire text in his second volume, consists of these examples and testimonies. But in a few key passages, especially in his letters XXIII (Recapitulation), LIII (Congress), and LV (Conclusion) of his first volume, in that volume's Preface, and in letters VI (on Marchamont Nedham) and VII (Conclusion) of his third volume, Adams declares his republican faith in a few concise principles. A brief restatement of these principles will point the way to the development of Adams's political thought in his next decade.

First, the social base of a tripartite republican structure, the existence of the One, the Few, and the Many, is ubiquitous in both time and space, found in

every nation across the globe, and in every century across the millennia of recorded history. Second, this eternal social base required every sound republic to have a single executive (the One) at its head, and for his protection this executive must be accorded a formally recognized role in the legislative power. Third, again because of government's social base, aristocratic forces (the Few) must be accorded a formally acknowledged role in the legislative power. This was necessary for two reasons: like the One, the Few are also ubiquitous in time and place and can never be abolished by any political action; and aristocracy, whether it is recognized by special titles and privileges or is based simply on the naturally superior talents and greater ambitions of its members, is the greatest threat to political stability in any society. Moreover, while an aristocracy may have many characteristics, its essential foundation is its control of large amounts of property. This affords aristocrats the capacity to overawe the people in popular elections and to overawe the people's representatives in popular assemblies. The best means of preventing this imbalance is to create an upper legislative chamber for the aristocracy and, insofar as possible, to confine its political activity to that chamber. Finally, the people (the Many) will be the happy and productive foundation of a republic wherever they can look to a strong executive to defend their interests against the aristocracy and have secure control of their own lower legislative house. Under these conditions, the aristocrats who would abuse them will instead, in their own legislative chamber, work for both their own honor and that of the republic.

The one thing that John Adams had not done in his *Defence of the Constitutions* was to explore in depth the nature of aristocracy. He would begin this exploration in earnest in 1790, in his "Discourses on Davila," and then, after a considerable hiatus, resume the effort during his long and intellectually fruitful retirement.

IX

John Adams's Republic in Republican America

1787–1800

Before this reaches you, [your pappa's] Book will have arrived. I should like to know its reception. I tell him they will think in America that he is for sitting up a King. He says no, but he is for giving to the Governours of every state the same Authority which the British King has, under the true British constitution, balancing his power by the other two Branches.

Abigail Adams to John Quincy Adams, 20 March 1787

A republic, you tell me, is a government in which "the people have an essential *share* in the sovereignty." Is not the *whole* sovereignty, my friend, essentially in the people?

Samuel Adams to John Adams, 20 November 1790

When John Adams disembarked with Abigail from the *Lucretia* to a hero's welcome in Boston on 17 June 1788, after a decade of diplomatic service in France, Holland, and Britain, his most recent pronouncements on republican government had preceded him. All three volumes of the *A Defence of the Constitutions* had reached America; the first, always the most widely known, had arrived in April 1787, just as delegates were setting off for the constitutional convention in Philadelphia. That volume, contrary to Adams's unshakable belief, had no clearly demonstrable impact on either the form or the substance of the federal Constitution, nor is it certain that any of the volumes made a significant contribution to the successful campaign for the document's ratification in any state. But the timing of Adams's return to America was propitious; just four days later New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify the Constitution, which technically insured its validation as the blueprint for the nation's new federal union. Virginia ratified the compact four days later, and New York fell into line in late July, thus guaranteeing that the new government would go into operation as soon as federal officials could be elected and assemble together to breathe life into the Framers' prose.[1]

Over the next dozen years, during his service as America's first vice president (1789–97) and second president (1797–1801), John Adams had the perfect opportunity to see at first hand the workings of America's new republican system at the federal level and could observe similar systems at the state level at only a little more distance. His countrymen had an equally perfect opportunity to view Adams's performance in office, to consider his published pronouncements on republican government, and to compare what he taught with his behavior in office and the republican thought of his contemporaries.

For nearly three years after his return to America in 1788, however, there was little public evidence that Adams's recent constitutional writings were either closely studied or highly controversial. Several of his countrymen had purchased the first volume of his *Defence of the Constitutions* in 1787, and at least a few read it closely. Several praised it, but other readers, especially in the middle and southern states, were highly critical of his argument. Both praise and criticism, however, were largely restricted to private letters; in 1787 just one pamphlet directly challenged Adams's new republican credo. But the increasingly partisan political atmosphere in the young republic and John Adams's own behavior after his return, both as vice president and again as an author, soon altered the context in which Americans viewed the *Defence* and all his writings on government.[2]

Almost immediately upon his return to Massachusetts, John Adams sensed a pronounced lack of interest by the American public in extending his public service. Attributing this coolness to his long absence in Europe, he believed that he had been largely forgotten and that only new candidates for office or those who had served continuously on American soil would receive public favor. But during his decade abroad, a more fundamental change than the mere passage of time had reshaped America's attitudes toward its young republics, and the new political climate was less receptive to Adams's distinctive republican principles.

By the late 1780s, the majority of the nation's politically active citizens, both leaders and followers, had come to hold three convictions that were not evident in the late 1770s. First, the movement toward accepting greater executive authority following the brief, sharp rejection of the prerogative powers of royal and proprietary governors in 1776, a development evident in the new constitutions of New York (1777) and Massachusetts (1780), had slowed to a halt. Adams's arguments for a yet stronger role for the executive in America would thereafter fall on deaf ears. Second, the public had become decidedly cool to the idea, so dear to John Adams, that legislative upper houses were the necessary and proper political homes for America's aristocrats. Indeed, Americans were coming to believe that aristocracy, however it might be defined, had no place in the life of their new nation. Finally, America's full acceptance of the whole people as the sole possessors of sovereign power led quickly to the rejection of any political distinction between different socioeconomic components of the people. In

adopting these beliefs, Americans forthrightly declared that they had triumphed over and escaped the traditional tripartite division of the polity into the One, the Few, and the Many, which had dominated republican thought since its inception in ancient Greece, and which still dominated John Adams's own thought. It was this triumph, and this escape, that John Adams believed was impossible to achieve in any nation.[3]

Within days of his landing in Boston in June 1788, the ratification of the new federal Constitution forced John Adams to make two decisions. Should he retire from public life, as he had planned to do in January 1787, when he had requested that Congress recall him from his British and Dutch missions, or should he join America's new national experiment? If he chose the latter course, what office should he seek? His personal finances did not compel him to secure further public employment. Despite fourteen nearly unbroken years of service to the nation, he could have resumed his legal practice with probable success, and he already had adequate property in Braintree and Boston to live in modest comfort. As his children were nearly all grown to maturity and his extensive personal library, always his greatest indulgence, was substantially complete to the current year, his annual expenses, never very large, seemed likely to diminish.[4]

On the other side of the equation were more weighty considerations. By 1788 public life had become John Adams's life. On the two previous occasions when he had seriously contemplated returning to his legal practice, in 1777 and in 1779, he had chosen instead the rigors of European diplomacy. The prospect of federal service appeared far less daunting, with travel by road to a capital city just two or three hundred miles south of Braintree, rather than a three thousand mile voyage across open seas. Even more important to John Adams were his hard-earned reputation and his potential fame. He felt that a prominent public position was his due for his years of sacrifice to the interests of his countrymen, and the one prize he most desired in life was the fame attendant on high office.[5]

But what office should he seek? His sense of what was his due was crucial. He could probably have secured an appointment as one of Massachusetts's two federal senators by the state legislature. That body, anticipating his return, had elected him to the last session of the Confederation Congress shortly before he landed in Boston, although he never attended that hapless gathering. The following year, when he presided over the new federal Senate as the nation's first vice president without being able to partake in its debates, he must have wondered more than once whether he should have sought a senator's seat. But Adams regarded both what he had done for the public and what he could still do as worthy of a greater reward. A few friends and admirers occasionally spoke of him as a suitable candidate for two other high posts, governor of Massachusetts and chief justice of the United States Supreme Court, but he expressed no interest

in either office. The one obvious position to hold was the vice presidency, not for itself, but as the key to securing his one unfulfilled desire, to become president of the United States. As long as George Washington was willing to serve, however, John Adams must wait his turn. In the fall of 1788, he quietly—or even tacitly—informed his friends that he was willing to wait, in the appropriate office.[6]

In both eighteenth-century British America and the young American republic, a man seldom "ran" for public office; he "stood" for office by informing political friends and allies that he was willing to serve. A candidate could inform his friends of his positions on crucial questions of policy and his support for or willingness to work with other candidates who held or were seeking other offices, but all such agreements were to be expressed indirectly, without any public statement, as well as tastefully and discreetly. In considering John Adams for the position of vice president in the fall of 1788, few of his supporters or opponents regarded his political views as a major issue. He was known to be a strong Federalist, that is to say, a firm supporter of the new federal Constitution. Any more singular ideas about republican government that he may have advanced, in the *Defence of the Constitutions* or elsewhere, were either largely unknown or considered unimportant by most political leaders.[7]

Adams's personal feelings toward George Washington were another matter. Although he admired Washington's commitment to public service, he was deeply envious of the general's popularity. He was rumored, accurately, to have made a few indiscreet criticisms of Washington's military performance in private letters and in conversation, both while he was in Congress and in Europe. Several of Washington's political friends were wary of Adams. They wanted the new nation to begin with the strongest possible support for the executive branch, and they probably sounded out Adams, most discreetly, about his feelings toward the general before they gave him their support in the Electoral College.[8]

As for Adams, despite his keen ambition he harbored doubts about continuing in public life through the summer and into the fall. In July he confessed his concerns to his daughter:

> You may be anxious, too, to know what is to become of me. . . . it appears to me that your father does not stand very high in the esteem, admiration, or respect of his country, or any part of it. In the course of a long absence his character has been lost, and he has got quite out of circulation. The public judgment, the public heart, and the public voice, seem to have decreed to others every public office he can accept with consistency, or honour, or reputation; and no other alternative is left for him, but private life at home, or to go again abroad. The latter is the worst of the two; but you may depend upon it, you will hear of him on a trading voyage to the East Indies, or to Surrinam, or Essequibo, before you will hear of his descending as a public man beneath himself.[9]

Sensitive as Adams was to any reluctance to support him for the vice presidency, he firmly resisted any display of eagerness for that support. If left to his own efforts, he might not have remained in public life. But a few New England friends whom Washington particularly respected, his former comrades in arms, made the case for Adams. In September 1788, General Benjamin Lincoln, a political friend and near neighbor of Adams, told Washington that "there is not a man in this part of the confederacy if one can be found in the whole of it, who would render your Excellency's situation at the head of government more agreeable." In the fall another good friend of both Washington and Adams, General Henry Knox, paid a visit to Braintree and probably used the occasion to assess Adams's feelings about serving in the new government with Washington. From whatever trusted sources, it appears that by January 1789 Washington was satisfied with the prospect of Adams as vice president and believed that he would be elected.[10]

Whatever his personal reservations, it is clear that from the summer of 1788 to the late winter of 1789 John Adams did nothing to discourage his election as vice president. Ten small clusters of presidential electors gathering separately in ten state capitals in the winter of 1789 cast their ballots. Washington, as expected, received the vote of all sixty-nine electors, but in several states few or none of these worthies favored Adams. His finally tally of thirty-four votes, although it placed him far ahead of any other contender, was just under half of this elite electorate. He was keenly disappointed, and when he later heard rumors about the politics behind some of the polling, he could not restrain his anger at Alexander Hamilton, who favored Adams's candidacy, but with little enthusiasm, and worked to keep down his tally in several states. On 6 April 1789, however, the suspense ended. The new federal Senate collected and examined the votes for president and vice president, Adams was promptly notified of his election, and on 13 April he set off from Braintree for the federal capital, New York City. On 21 April, just two days before Washington's triumphal arrival from Virginia, Adams took the oath of office as vice president and addressed the Senate, over which he would preside for the next eight years.[11]

1. Adams and the First Congress

Given the force of John Adams's ambition and his continuous public service since 1774, his decision in 1788 to remain in public life and make himself available for the vice presidency as a likely path to America's highest office was highly predictable. But his course upon assuming that new post was neither preordained nor without surprises. Although he strongly suspected that his countrymen would be critical of his increasingly distinctive political ideas, he made no attempt, in his first two years in federal office, to adjust either his public or his private speech and behavior to any resistance that his vision of republicanism might encounter. Nor did he have any plan or strategy for performing his duties

as vice president. This is hardly surprising, for no one in the federal government, including several Framers of the Constitution, knew what kind of office the novel vice presidency would become. Within less than a month, however, his unique ideology and the peculiarities of his new position would together estrange President George Washington and several members of both houses of Congress from Vice President John Adams. This estrangement would last for nearly a decade, and would shape the course of Adams's entire federal service. It all began with a question of protocol in the opening weeks of the new federal Congress.[12]

On 23 April, just two days after Adams took his oath of office in the Senate chamber, and just as president-elect George Washington was landing in New York City, the senators realized that they had no settled form of address for either the vice president or the president, who would shortly take his oath of office in their presence. With respect to the president, the question was particularly acute: Should Congress accord him a formal honorific title, and if so, should that title follow European models of fealty to heads of state, or should they adopt a more egalitarian American style? John Adams was not required to take part in this decision, but he plunged immediately into the debate, speaking in favor of some variation on "His Highness," "His most benign Highness," or "His Majesty, the President." The majority of the senators evidently agreed with this sentiment, and promptly appointed a committee to confer "with such Committee as the House of Representatives shall appoint for that purpose" and recommend a title. This committee, over the strong objections of a zealous minority, secured Senate approval for proposing to the House the title: "His Highness the President of the United States of America and Protector of their Liberties."[13]

The executive titles controversy set off both the first political controversy within the United States Senate and the Senate's first battle with the more democratically inclined House of Representatives. In the end, the House flatly rejected authorizing any title for either the president or the vice president. Henceforth, both officers would be formally addressed simply as "Sir" and referred to simply by the titles of their respective positions given in the Constitution. The manner in which this brief controversy unfolded, however, had a far greater impact upon John Adams than it did upon George Washington.[14]

Adams soon discovered that his mere participation in the executive titles debate, quite apart from the position that he espoused, raised a constitutional issue that he had not foreseen. He evidently assumed that as the Senate's presiding officer (and entitled, under the Constitution, to cast a vote whenever the chamber was equally divided), he was a fully qualified member of that body who could speak on any issue. But John Adams was not a senator, and as the titles controversy and other floor debates wore on, more and more senators began to resent his behaving like one. The curiously hybrid character of the vice presidency—a

part of the executive branch, but without a clear executive role; an officer of Congress, but with only the most limited legislative role—bred uncertainty and confusion, and the office has deeply frustrated most of its occupants for more than two centuries. As late as 1960–61, as sophisticated a veteran of the Senate as Vice President Lyndon Johnson was quietly rebuffed when he failed to appreciate the fundamental distinction between any vice president, no matter how admirable his prior achievement in public office—even in the Senate itself—and any member of that legislative body. Nearly two centuries earlier John Adams failed to observe this same distinction and was soon forced to sit in his chair in silence.[15]

Of more immediate importance, however, was the impact of Adams's campaign for a grand executive title upon its intended beneficiary. George Washington was not initially opposed to taking on some title, and a skillful handling of the matter in Congress might have secured a well-established but not too elevated mark of executive distinction, such as "His/Your Excellency." But as the issue grew more contentious, Adams became identified in the eyes of many ardent republicans, in and out of Congress, with the idea of a monarchical presidency, a concept that numerous passages in his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States* did nothing to dispel. Several of Washington's supporters in Virginia were particularly offended at the vice president's behavior, and the president soon became wary of any unnecessary contact with Adams. The upshot was Washington's quiet decision to restrict discussions of executive policy to the narrow circle of his department secretaries, supplemented by occasional consultations with one or two favored congressmen, or with Chief Justice John Jay (on foreign policy, Adams's particular area of expertise). For nearly eight years, until he assumed the presidency, John Adams was without the smallest executive role in the government of the new republic, even in the consideration of questions on which he was an established authority. Whether his inclusion in the president's inner circle would have been good for Washington, or of significant benefit to the nation, must remain an open question. It would have been a most welcome development for the underemployed and frustrated vice president.[16]

What is nearly always missed in appraisals of Adams's role in the executive titles controversy, however, is his motivation. Several historians, quoting from the irresistibly colorful diary of Adams's harsh critic, Senator William Maclay, stress Adams's stiff-backed pomposity in the whole affair. Yet several other leaders of the early republic, including the titles committee chair, Senator Richard Henry Lee, the majority of the senators, and initially President Washington himself, all thought that a formal title for the president was only proper. John Adams shared both their feeling that the chief executive of their new nation deserved a distinctive title and their concern that America's head of state be respected by Europe's hereditary rulers who would, without exception, sport

much grander titles. But Adams had deeper reasons for seeking an elevated form of address for America's president.[17]

Writing to his good friend Dr. Benjamin Rush shortly after the controversy ended, Adams explained the many benefits that honorific titles would provide a republic. They would reward their recipients' virtuous sacrifice in performing public service, stimulate a proper pride in their achievement, and encourage the general public's respect for their leaders. Adams believed that the systematic employment of such titles would teach every citizen, high and low, that a vital element in the life of any republic was public virtue, personal sacrifice for the good of the whole. But he had additional reasons for espousing a mark of honor for the chief executive.[18]

First, of course, was his conviction of the necessity of protecting the power and independence of the chief executive in any republic. This principle is evident in his diary as early as 1775, plays a prominent role in his 1779 draft of the Massachusetts Constitution, and appears countless times in virtually every section—and in some sections on nearly every page—of his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*. One feature of this belief, however, is often misunderstood. Adams was widely criticized in the early 1790s for advocating a quasi-monarchical republic in which the executive would sit in haughty splendor about the mass of citizens. And just two months after the titles controversy ended, he forcefully expressed his belief that America's executive should indeed play a quasi-monarchical role. But John Adams never imagined that America's president would have any need to overawe the common citizenry, because he was convinced that the people would always support a virtuous chief executive. The natural enemy of any republican executive, he believed, was not the people, but that republic's aristocracy, particularly where it was vested in an upper legislative house, such as the United States Senate. For Adams, the primary purpose of an impressive executive title was not to set America's head of state above its common citizens but to place him above its proud, ambitious senators.[19]

The executive titles controversy ended badly for John Adams. Local newspapers quickly got wind of the controversy, placed the vice president at its center, and repeated sarcastic remarks by his political opponents, who soon took to referring to him as "His Rotundity" and "The Duke of Braintree." On 14 May, the Senate gave up the fight, and America's chief executive became forever known simply as "Mr. President." Soon thereafter, that democratic title's leading proponent, Congressman James Madison, reported to Thomas Jefferson that John Adams had been the driving force in the Senate's attempt to label the president "His Highness the President of the U.S. and protector of their liberties." In late July, Jefferson replied that the Senate's proposed title was "the most superlatively ridiculous thing I ever heard of."[20]

But Adams was unrepentant. In July he would state explicitly (but privately) that America's president should be considered a republican monarch. And just

one year after the controversy ended, Adams would revisit the role of honor and respect in political life and come to even more sweeping conclusions. In his "Discourses on Davila" (1790–91), he took an extended detour from his discussion of France's sixteenth-century civil wars to explore the universal psychological foundations of the need for this respect.

Among all of John Adams's New England colleagues in the opening years of the federal government, Congressman Roger Sherman of Connecticut came from the most similar social and cultural background. Some fourteen years Adams's senior, he too was born into a middle-class farming family, less than twenty miles from Braintree. But where Deacon John Adams had a steady income, increased his land holdings, and could afford to send his son to college, Sherman's father experienced falling fortunes and died in 1741, just as his son reached maturity. Soon thereafter, Roger left Massachusetts for better opportunities in western Connecticut, where he first succeeded as a farmer and cordwainer, two occupations that Deacon John Adams was pursuing in these same years in Braintree. Surveying, trade, publishing almanacs, and eventually the law brought Sherman greater prosperity, and before he was thirty he began a long and successful career in public life, first in his town, then in the Connecticut legislature, and finally in Congress. Never a brilliant orator, he quickly became a reliable legislator with a gift for fashioning compromises.[21]

Sherman attended the First Continental Congress in 1774 and thereafter was seldom off the national stage. Always in the right place at the right time, at every deliberative body's vital center, he earned the distinction of being the only signer of Congress's Declaration and Resolves of 1774, the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the United States Constitution. It was at the Philadelphia convention that he had his most memorable triumph. He led the delegates from the smaller states in constructing the Connecticut Compromise, which designed the Senate, with two members for every state regardless of its size, to balance the House of Representatives, based on state populations. When Sherman entered the House in March 1789 as part of Connecticut's first delegation to the federal Congress, he was the epitome of the veteran national legislator. Two years later, at age seventy, "Father Sherman" would cap off his career by entering the Senate that he had worked so hard to create; in another two years, he would die in that office.[22]

If any federal officeholder was in a position to understand John Adams, it was Roger Sherman. The two had known one another since August 1774, when they met on route to the First Continental Congress, and had served together on several congressional committees, including that named in June 1776 to draft the Declaration of Independence, as well as on the Board of War, which Adams chaired until he left Congress in 1777. Twelve years later, as the new federal government began its operations, Roger Sherman was at the center of Federalist politics, a man who knew everything that had happened on the national stage,

and how it had happened, for the past fifteen years. But his brief exchange of letters with Adams in July shows how widely the vice-president had departed from America's political mainstream, and even from its Federalist right channel, over the past decade.[23]

In mid-July 1789, Sherman sent Adams his observations on the relationship between the president and Congress as set out in the Constitution, a topic then engaging the Senate as it considered whether the president had the power to remove appointed officials without its approval. Sherman was most intent on countering the currently popular argument that the Constitution did not sufficiently separate the executive and legislative powers. He believed that it was a political error to insist on an absolute separation, and indeed, so did both Adams and Washington. But Adams spent little time appraising Sherman's larger thesis, which he thoroughly approved, and focused instead on his statement that Great Britain's decision to make its monarch "one branch of the legislature, [with] a negative on all the Laws" was "perhaps . . . an extreme not to be imitated by a republic."[24]

John Adams had been combating this belief since he drafted Massachusetts's constitution a decade earlier. In his reply of 17 July, he opened his counterargument by offering his definition of a republic, "a government whose sovereignty is vested in more than one person," to show that a monarch who shared in the legislative power with one or more legislative bodies was in fact an essential part of the first of "three species [of republics], monarchical, aristocratical, and democratical." England, therefore, was "a republic, a monarchical republic it is true, but a republic still," because its sovereignty, the legislative power, was divided "between the one, the few, and the many, or in other words, between the natural division of mankind in society,—the monarchical, the aristocratic, and the democratical."[25]

Here Adams displays a crucial difference between his political thought and that of the great majority of his American contemporaries. They believed that sovereignty resided unambiguously and entirely in the whole people, a faith that Samuel Adams would declare in his exchange of letters with his cousin John in the fall of 1790 (sect. 3, below). For John Adams, however, active sovereignty was vested in and identical with the legislative power, although the whole people did retain a fundamental Lockean sovereignty, the right to change their government at any time. They could grant the legislative power, either deliberately or passively, freely or under duress, to a single person, who thus became an absolute monarch. In forming a republic, however, the whole people chose to divide up the legislative power according to some stated plan, most preferably, in Adams's view, between a sole executive (the One), who was recognized as having an equal share in the legislative power, an upper legislative house (the Few), which comprised the aristocracy, and a lower legislative house (the Many), which directly represented the common people of the republic.[26]

Thus far, Adams had merely repeated, in his most succinct expression to date, his basic position in his monumental *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*. But on the following day (18 July), in a second reply to Sherman's letter, he found his first occasion to apply this central theme of the *Defence* directly to the federal government:

> Let us now consider what our constitution is, and see whether any other name can with propriety be given it, than that of a monarchical republic, or if you will, a limited monarchy. The duration of our president is neither perpetual nor for life; it is only for four years; but his power during those four years is much greater than that of an avoyer, a consul, a podestà, a doge, a stadtholder; nay, than the king of Poland; nay, than the king of Sparta. I know of no first magistrate in any republican government, excepting England and Neuchatel, who possesses a constitutional dignity, authority, and power comparable to his.[27]

After enumerating several of the president's powers, Adams stated that America's "laws cannot be executed without them" and "the lives, liberties, properties and characters of the citizens cannot be secure without their protection." He then declared that the president's powers "ought to have been still greater, or much less. The limitations upon them in the cases of war, treaties, and appointments to office, and especially the limitation on the president's independence as a branch of the legislative [i.e., his limited veto power], will be the destruction of this constitution, and involve us in anarchy, if not amended." Without this change, Adams concluded, "the legislative power, in our constitution, is greater than the executive," and would encroach upon it, particularly because "the aristocratical power [vested in the Senate] is greater than either the monarchical or democratical. That will, therefore, swallow up the other two."[28]

On 20 July, Sherman replied to both of Adams's letters. In orthodox republican language that would have merited the approval of the great majority of American officeholders and citizens, whether proto-Federalists or proto–Democratic Republicans, he politely dissented from Adams's view that America's president needed the powers of Britain's king. In phrasing strikingly similar to that of the passage in Baron Turgot's 1778 letter to Dr. Richard Price to which Adams took such extended offense in 1786 (see chap. 8, sect. 2), he remarked: "In Great Britain, where there are the rights of the nobility as well as the rights of the common people to support, it may be necessary that the crown should have a complete negative to preserve the balance; but in a republic like ours, wherein is no higher rank than that of common citizens, unless distinguished by appointments to office, what occasion can there be for such a balance?" Sherman went on to defend both the Senate's power to advise and consent on presidential appointments and the limitation of the president's veto power.[29]

But by then, Adams was composing his third and longest letter. He began with a vigorous defense of an absolute veto for the executive, arguing that it

would take great courage for the president to defy the will of Congress, and of the public as well, since veto messages were public documents. He then proceeded to criticize the Senate's right to reject presidential appointments, its right to reject treaties, and the right of both houses of Congress to reject the president's call for a declaration of war, and concluded with a more detailed critique of the Senate's power to block appointments. Shortly thereafter, probably within a day or two, Sherman sent to Adams his third letter, in which he defended the Senate's power to assist the president in the executive actions indicated in the Constitution and argued that the Senate would never be a hindrance or a threat to the president but a vital support to him. On this contested point, the exchange ended.[30]

Both Adams's outspoken defense of an executive title from the Senate podium in April–May and his claim that America's chief executive was a republican monarch in his exchange with Roger Sherman in July can be regarded as testimony to the strong sentiment for monarchical dignity that gripped many of the young republic's leaders in 1789. Gordon Wood has effectively appraised this longing to secure the authority of a monarch by creating an American chief executive who would be a not so pale shadow of the king of Great Britain. The idea of monarchy exerted a surprisingly broad appeal in the first few months of the new federal government, not only among several proto-Federalists, like Alexander Hamilton and George Washington, but also to some anti-Federalists, most notably Senator Richard Henry Lee. Several other Framers of the U.S. Constitution, however, led by Congressman James Madison, were appalled at this eagerness to embrace the splendor of monarchy, and they set to work immediately to bring this craze for the trappings and, indeed, some of the substance of monarchy within proper republican bounds.[31]

But John Adams's interest in monarchy was fundamentally different from that of Hamilton, Washington, or Lee. They wished to clothe an executive office that they regarded as purely republican in the robes of monarchy to secure greater authority and effectiveness for that position, and for the government as a whole. Adams strongly approved this goal, but his conception of the executive was far more radical within the republican framework in two respects. First, he favored amending the Constitution to give America's president much greater formal power than he had been granted in 1787. Second, he argued that America's new republic, defective though it may have been in his eyes, was already a republican monarchy.

Just three months into his service in the new federal government, John Adams had exhibited irrefutable proof that his view of republican theory and practice differed from that of virtually all his important contemporaries. One cannot say how widely the singularity of his thought was appreciated by either the political establishment or the general public. His conduct during the executive titles controversy was briefly held up to public ridicule in the local press, but he

had several prominent allies in this quixotic quest. And his correspondence with Roger Sherman was private, although it is not known whether Sherman divulged Adams's views to other political leaders. But even if Sherman kept the vice president's opinions in confidence (which Adams had not requested), by the spring of 1790 Adams was largely isolated from President Washington, alienated from several senators and congressmen, and frustrated in his effectively muzzled office. His ideal republic, to the extent that his countrymen knew of its existence, was radically different from their own. It remains uncertain how controversial his ideas had yet become, or how much attention the American public was paying to them. At just this point, John Adams began a new literary venture.

2. The "Discourses on Davila"

On 28 April 1790, John Adams published, anonymously, the first of thirty-two essays under the title "Discourses on Davila" in John Fenno's *Gazette of the United States*, the leading Federalist newspaper in the national capital. When the government moved to Philadelphia in November 1790, Fenno's journal moved as well and continued to publish the "Davila" essays until 27 April 1791, when Adams abruptly announced the series' termination. His ostensible objective, a commentary on Enrico Davila's *Historia delle Guerre civili di Francia* (History of the Civil Wars in France), was far from complete in April 1791; he left off well before either Davila's text or the French civil wars had ended. Adams's decision to abandon his "Davila" essays in midcourse was in part an intellectual one; the conclusion of his last essay suggests that he had become bored with the exercise and believed that his readers had as well. Some two decades later, however, he wrote that the current state of American politics had convinced him to desist. Both he and Fenno, he remembered, were concerned that the "Discourses" were becoming the target of inflammatory attacks in the increasingly divisive political atmosphere of the young republic, and he feared that his essays were giving a distorted and damaging view of his republican principles.[32]

In 1805 all but one of Adams's "Davila" essays were collected and published in a single volume under an expanded title, with an advertisement, a brief introduction, and a postscript. The resulting *Discourses on Davila*, whether considered under its 1790–91 or its 1805 date, was the last major political work that John Adams published solely on his own initiative and not as a response to a critique of his earlier writings or of his public career. It shares many features with his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*, particularly in its uneven organization and heavy use of quotation and paraphrase, both marked and unmarked, attributed and unsourced. Its political thesis is virtually identical to that of the *Defence* and of Adams's 1789 letters to Roger Sherman, and one scholar, echoing brief statements that Adams himself made during his retirement, has called *Davila* the "fourth volume" of that larger work, a claim first ventured in the

advertisement of the 1805 edition. Unlike the *Defence*, which appears to have been prompted or sustained by several current events of varying motivating force, the impetus for this work remains quite obscure.[33]

Adams himself provided no introduction to his essays, but plunged directly into an early passage from *Historia delle Guerre civili di Franca*, without identifying it. He then began his first paragraph of commentary thus: "Here, perhaps, Davila is incautious and incorrect." Neither here nor later does he say who Davila was or give the title of his work. Any reader who took the trouble to find out would learn that Enrico Davila's *Historia delle Guerre civili* appeared in 1630 and quickly became the most popular treatment of France's late sixteenth-century civil wars throughout Europe, although it was never widely known in North America. Adams owned and marked up a 1757 French translation, from which he evidently translated into English the long passages that appear in his essays, as well as an unmarked 1647 English translation, which he may not even have consulted. Nearly all his marked quotations are from Davila's *Historia delle Guerre* and appear in the essentially chronological order they do there. He also paraphrased important passages from Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in early essays in his series and quoted at length from that source in one essay. If readers of the *Gazette* were puzzled to discover a motive for writing these unsigned essays, they could easily be forgiven.[34]

When he republished the 1805 text of Adams's *Davila* in his edition of his grandfather's works in 1851, Charles Francis Adams rearranged the early essays and supplied a context for them by remarking: "They were stimulated mainly by the manifest tendencies of the revolution in France, but mediately by the publication of the Marquis Condorcet, entitled *Quattre Lettres d'un Bourgeois de New Haven* . . . , being a defence of the position formerly taken by M. Turgot." This statement, together with the date of the essays' initial publication and a few brief passages in the essays themselves, may have persuaded several modern readers to see "Davila" primarily as a critique of the French Revolution. One scholar pictured Adams as aiming his stern political lessons directly at the French. And once Thomas Jefferson, in April 1791, subtly implied that the "Davila" series was just the sort of antirepublican political literature that he hoped Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* would effectively counter (see sect. 4, below), it seemed only natural to connect the essays to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), which had prompted Paine's reply.[35]

Several of these connections with the French Revolution are plausible, but none are highly persuasive of Adams's intentions in writing this singular work. He began his "Davila" essays with no stated objective and with no implied objective beyond presenting, through his comments on a work that thoroughly absorbed his attention, historical lessons that he believed were still highly relevant to both France and America. He did level several criticisms against certain aspects of the unfolding Revolution, and he occasionally addressed the French

people directly, but these passages extended to no more than isolated paragraphs. At no point do the essays show either an extensive knowledge of or a deep interest in the latest revolutionary events in Paris. This is particularly striking in the context of the very pages on which Adams's "Davila" essays first appeared. In 1790 and 1791, Fenno's *Gazette* was filled with detailed political reports from Paris, and with other series of anonymous essays, by both American and British writers, which commented directly and at length on the ongoing Revolution. Nor did John Adams make any reference to Edmund Burke, but this last fact is hardly surprising. Burke's attack on the French Revolution was not published in England until November 1790, well after all but the briefest concluding remarks on that event had appeared in the "Davila" essays.[36]

Charles Francis Adams's belief that *Davila* was in part a response to the centralizing political philosophy of Turgot and Condorcet, however, seems eminently reasonable. John Adams intensely disliked the commitment of both *philosophes* to the French enthusiasm for gathering all political authority into one institutional center, a national unicameral legislature; Turgot's espousal of this thesis had been the primary impetus for his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States* in 1786–87. Yet Adams made no mention of Turgot in "Davila," and in the published essays' most substantive reference to Condorcet he appeared to believe that the writer shared his political views. Indeed, he looked forward to making "our more particular compliments" to that author's recent *Quattre Lettres d'un Bourgeois de New Haven*, a work that Adams had evidently not yet read with any care in 1790. For those Americans who had read Adams's *Defence of the Constitutions*, the occasional appearance of Condorcet's name and the merest hint of Turgot's political philosophy could well have underscored the thematic connections between those volumes and the current essays, but these subtle hints were quite misleading about the later work. Any attempt to label the "Davila" essays, in their original serial appearance, either as a substantive critique of the French Revolution or as the fourth volume of the *Defence*—even when attested by Adams himself, some two decades later—ignores the work's essential content.[37]

What, then, should a reader look for in John Adams's "Discourses on Davila"? First, the essays, which were aimed squarely at an American audience and include several brief references to American state and national politics, present an interesting application of Adams's constitutional ideas to a historically somewhat distant subject that he found quite compelling. Second, they provide a few notable comments on the French Revolution, toward which Adams was clearly skeptical from the outset but was not, in 1790, entirely hostile. Finally, and of by far the greatest significance, twelve essays early in the series, substantially influenced by Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, offer the most important statement of John Adams's mature thoughts on human psychology and, in

particular, on the role of pride and the quest for fame in the political life of a republic.

Adams's opening essay, which quoted extensively from Davila's introductory survey of French history, from the fifth-century Frankish invasion of Gaul to the early sixteenth-century reign of Louis XII, immediately identified a fatal flaw in both the historian's analysis and the underlying foundation of the French monarchy. Davila asserted that, from the outset, the Franks "resolved to choose a king who should unite in his single person *all the authority of the nation*." Just three pages later, however, he declared that the "*states general* of the kingdom, in whom resides the entire power of the whole nation whom they represent," had frequently confirmed the rights of the junior branches of the royal family, the "princes of the blood," to an elevated status, both as regents for young kings and as legitimate successors to kings who had no heirs.[38]

Davila evidently saw no contradiction here, but Adams did. This fundamental uncertainty over the locus of sovereignty, he argued, had a baneful effect on all of French history. Translating the problem into the language he had used from *Thoughts on Government* and the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 to the *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*, Adams summarized France's fundamental dilemma: "[W]hile it was never sufficiently ascertained, whether the sovereignty resided in the king or in the national assembly [i.e., the states general], it was equally uncertain whether the king had a negative on the assembly; whether the grandees [the princes of the blood] had a negative on the king or the people [as represented in the national assembly]; and whether the people had a negative on both or either."[39]

Seemingly unaware of this confusion, Davila proceeded to narrate the thirteenth-century division between the ruling House of Valois and the junior House of Bourbon and their open warfare in the fifteenth century. In this dynastic conflict Adams saw the seeds of the devastating civil-religious wars to come. Before proceeding with his discourses, however, he stated that "it will assist us, in comprehending [Davila's] narration, as well as in making many useful reflections in morals and policy, to turn our thoughts for a few moments to the constitution of the human mind. This we shall endeavor to do in our next essay." Adams did not, in fact, turn immediately to "the constitution of the human mind," although Charles Francis Adams's text of *Davila* in Adams's *Works* made it appear that he did. Instead, he devoted two more essays to commentary on early sixteenth-century France. When he finally began his exploration of human nature, however, the ensuing twelve essays, comprising nearly one-third of his entire series, became the most interesting and valuable part of his "Discourses."[40]

The essays at issue here, the original fourth through the fifteenth in Fenno's *Gazette*, show all the earmarks of Adams's later compositions. They

mix promiscuously together direct quotations, paraphrased passages, and original material; they occasionally wander off topic or repeat historical examples; and they have no obvious thematic introduction or any formal conclusion. The reader of this series within a series could only be sure of its end when Adams, in essay 16, finally returned to the text of Davila's *Historia* and resumed his commentary on the historian's treatment of sixteenth-century France—with brief asides on current French or American politics—from the ascension of Henry II to the throne in 1547 to the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572. This critical survey, comprising some two-thirds of Adams's text, takes up all but the last dozen remaining pages of his "Davila" essays. It is in the twelve essays that precede this commentary, however, that Adams sets out his deepest convictions about human nature and its relationship to every manifestation of government in a clear progression from the individual to the community—that is, from the innate nature of every man to the impact of that nature on the government of all men. Because John Adams's *Davila* essays are now known almost entirely from Charles Francis Adams's 1851 text in his *Works of John Adams*, the following discussion will follow the order, numbering, and text of the essays in that edition.[41]

Davila's second essay, in C. F. Adams's reordering, opens with John Adams's belief that men everywhere were, from their most "primitive condition," gregarious creatures provided by nature with a set of "passions, appetites, and . . . faculties" designed "to render them useful to each other in their social connections." Among these, none was more essential, and more troublesome, than their "*passion for distinction*." Adams discovered this passion in both men and women, young and old, and at every level of society, no matter how elevated or degraded. It was, to his mind, the most powerful spring to human action, both physical and intellectual. Appearing in several guises, from the most admirable to the most deplorable, from *emulation* and *ambition* to *vanity*, *jealously*, and *envy*, it shaped every social relationship and formed the basis of the hierarchies found in every human community and institution, no matter how small. Adams did acknowledge the existence of a quite different human capacity, for *benevolence*, what modern social scientists often call altruism, "but alone it is not a balance for the selfish affections."[42]

Yet nature had provided a remedy for this imbalance. It created in every man the desire to have whatever distinction he might achieve recognized by his neighbors, a passion for the esteem and admiration of other men. Adams considered this hunger for recognition so basic that it "is a principal end of government to regulate this passion, which in its turn becomes a principal means of government. It is the only adequate instrument of order and subordination in society, and alone commands effectual obedience to the laws, since without it neither human reason, nor standing armies, would ever produce that great effect."[43]

Adams devoted the rest of his second essay and all of his third to considering the various forms that distinction and esteem took in human relations. He

began by arguing that beauty, elegance, riches, and honors were all desired "not so much for the pleasure they afford, as the attention they command." This power to attract attention explained both the dynamics of courtship and the appeal of "dancing and drawing, painting and music, riding or fencing," next to which the more solid pleasures of learning and moral virtue paled in comparison. His third essay, on riches and poverty, was even more pointed in arguing that it was not the respective pleasures and sufferings of those two conditions but the respective adulation and neglect that they elicited from society that determined human attitudes toward them. Notable in a man reared in a nominally Calvinist theological culture, Adams would not concede that there was any real virtue in wealth or any deserved contempt in the mere condition of poverty. But as the world disagreed, the rich were determined to reap their reward, the admiration of their neighbors; the poor could only endure in silence their greatest burden, that they were "not seen." Adams insisted, however, that even the poorest drew what solace they could in comparing themselves to others in yet more degraded circumstances than themselves. Surely, he wrote, "there must be one, indeed, who is the last and lowest of the human species. But there is no risk in asserting, that there is no man who believes and will acknowledge himself to be that man."[44]

In the several essays that follow this close examination of the human psyche, Adams argues that the universal passion for distinction motivates all human exertion and is the foundation of all organizations and institutions, and of all governments. His fourth essay explores the use of visible marks of honor, primarily in dress and ceremony, that successful cultures and governments organized into a clear language of signs. The ancient Romans, he declares, excelled at this, and he presents the triumphal procession in Rome to celebrate the victory of Paulus Aemelius over a Macedonian king, who was marched with his sons through the streets in chains, to show that for both the general and the Roman people the honor bestowed by the republic was greater in their eyes than the bitter personal tragedy of the recent deaths of Paulus's two youngest sons. In his fifth essay, Adams declares: "Nature has ordained [this passion for distinction] as a constant incentive to activity and industry." Therefore, both "the theory of education, and the science of government, may be reduced to the same simple principle, and be all comprehended in the knowledge of the means of actively conducting, controlling, and regulating the emulation and ambition of the citizens."[45]

To achieve this control, however, would never be easy. Adams opens his sixth essay by declaring that even the most public-spirited ambition was "a passion still; and therefore, like all other human desires, unlimited and insatiable." The challenges to controlling ambition were many. The first was man's eagerness to pursue and secure honor by any means, most often by acquiring vast land holdings and high office, and thereby creating a distinguished reputation for

oneself and establishing a distinguished family that would provide a durable foundation for further ambitions by one's descendants. The common people, who were seldom able to stem this tide of aristocratic aggression by themselves, turned to powerful monarchs to defend them. But this, in turn, often led to the idolization of princes, seen most vividly in popular expressions of sorrow at the fall of even the worst monarchs. At this point, Adams turned to venerated authorities to continue his argument. His eighth essay quotes at length the commentary on the distress of the British people at the beheading of Charles I, and even following the mere expulsion of James II from England, in Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Adams's ninth and tenth essays illustrate the profound veneration for hierarchies expressed in every culture with quotations from Pope and Shakespeare.[46]

But even the deepest respect for royal authority would never overcome the spirited and often violent rivalries at every level of human endeavor, rivalries between neighboring communities, and between different trades, professions, churches, schools, and universities within a community. And it only intensified the rivalries between nations. Citing an essay in a recent political geography, Adams noted that a simple map of Europe could explain most of the rivalries and alliances between nations. Adjacent nations were nearly always rivals, and were often deadly enemies, whereas nations that were physically separated from other nations were often allies. This principle, Adams observed, was the basis for the well-founded hope, articulated by Adams himself on the floor of the Continental Congress in 1776, that a declaration of independence would encourage France to come to America's aid against its perennial enemy, Great Britain. And more sadly, Adams asked, were not Americans already seeing

> emulations of a serious complexion among ourselves?: between cities and universities? between north and south? the middle and the north? the middle and the south? between one state and another? between the governments of states and the national government? and between individual patriots and heroes in all these? What is the natural remedy against the inconveniences and dangers of these rivalries? Whether a well-balanced constitution, such as that our Union purports to be, ought not to be cordially supported by every good citizen, as our only hope of peace and our ark of safety, till its defects, if it has any, can be corrected?[47]

Adams concluded this remarkable eleventh essay with his belief that even a sound constitution could not control a nation's internal rivalries and ambitions without employing well-ordered distinctions that recognized civic merit. To drive this point home, Adams ended the essay with "Davila"'s longest and most powerful critique of the French Revolution:

> We are told that our friends, the National Assembly of France, have abolished all distinctions. But be not deceived, my dear countrymen. Impossibilities cannot be performed. Have they levelled all fortunes and equally divided all property? Have they made all men and women equally wise, elegant, and beautiful? Have they annihilated the names of Bourbon and Montmorenci, Rochefoucauld and Noailles, Lafayette and La Maignon, Necker and De Calonne, Mirabeau and Bailly? Have they committed to the flames all the records, annals, and histories of the nation? . . . Have they burned all their pictures, and broken all their statues? Have they blotted out of all memories, the names, places of abode, and illustrious actions of all their ancestors? Have they not still princes of the first and second order, nobles and knights? Have they no record nor memory who are the men who compose the present national assembly? Do they wish to have that distinction forgotten? Have the French officers who served in America melted their eagles and torn their ribbon?[48]

Adams's concluding essays in his detour from Enrico Davila's history mix spirited exhortations to Frenchmen and Americans with general maxims that tie government to the human passions. He begins essay 12 by stating as a common, historically validated observation that "the passion of avarice . . . produced treachery, cowardice, and a selfish, unsocial meanness, but had no tendency to produce those virtues of patience, courage, fortitude, honor, or patriotism," while "the general attention to birth produced a different kind of sentiments,—those of pride in the maxims and principles of religion, morals, and government." This led many nations to rely on pride of birth to counteract pride of wealth. He applies this lesson to his concern that the French National Assembly might attempt to abolish all distinctions, but tentatively believes that they will not proceed to this extreme, and concludes the essay with an appeal to France to follow Dr. Richard Price's advice to create a bicameral legislature, a "third estate" that can be "a check as now takes place in the American government, and is indispensable in the British government."[49]

The passionate thirteenth essay opens with two related observations, that "the world grows more enlightened," and "titles and distinctions, ranks and orders, parade and ceremony, are all going out of fashion." Adams sees some good in all this, but warns against destroying "all decorum, discipline, and subordination," and predicts that "riches, honors, and beauty" will not go out of style. He then declares that "the more knowledge is diffused, the more the passions are extended, and the more furious they grow," and cites the intense rivalry for scholarly distinction in two of Europe's greatest intellectual centers, the Royal Society in London and the literary world of Paris. This sets up his most direct exhortation to the French nation, and the most succinct statement of his view of the relationship between the natural passions that create social

distinctions and effective government: "The affectation of being exempted from passions is inhuman. The grave pretension to such singularity is solemn hypocrisy. Consider that government is intended to set bounds to passions which nature has not limited."[50]

He then turns to Americans, whom he urges not to follow any foreign (i.e., French) examples but to look back to the principles of liberty expressed in two of their own revolutionary declarations of rights, that of Boston, which accompanied its creation of the committees of correspondence system in 1772, and that of the First Continental Congress in 1774 (of which Adams was a coauthor). These lessons, he hopes, may counteract the naive political and social optimism of 1790. There will always be rivalry between the rich and the poor, between those who have leisure for study or for less admirable diversions and those who must work with their hands, distinctions that no amount of education—of which Adams says there can never be too much—can erase. Therefore, his countrymen must exercise caution and sobriety in their public affairs: "Emulation next to self-preservation will forever be the great spring of human actions, and the balance of a well-ordered government will alone be able to prevent that emulation from degenerating into dangerous ambition, irregular rivalries, destructive factions, wasting seditions, and bloody civil wars." He concludes the essay with a touching passage warning against the more distant but still discernible threat of atheism—the only response to religious questions that Adams found intolerable. "Is there a possibility," he asked, "that the government of nations may fall into the hands of men who teach the most disconsolate of all creeds, that men are but fireflies, and that this *all* is without a father?"[51]

Adams's return to extensive quotations from and briefer comments on Davila's history in the fourteenth essay of his *Discourses* (the sixteenth in the original order in the *Gazette*) brought the series back to its original design but sharply diminished his own creative input. For over one hundred pages, through essay 30, he let Davila do most of the talking; his periodic interjections were nearly all to the same point—the necessity for sharing the legislative power between a strong executive and two strong legislative houses—that he had been making since his *Defence of the Constitutions* in 1787. Moreover, he was now hastily attempting to get through Davila's long narrative. He had commented on less than half of the historian's text, and probably began to worry through the winter and early spring of 1791 that he would never finish his task.[52]

Adams's thirty-first essay abruptly changed the course of his argument. He began with a vivid but brief account of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of Huguenots by Catholic forces under the French regent, Catherine de Medici (August 1572), from which he drew his usual lesson, the horrors of public life in any nation that lacked "a fixed and known constitution." But at this point, long before the end of France's civil wars or Davila's treatment of them, he suddenly declared: "It is not intended, at this time, to pursue any further this instructive

though melancholy history, nor to make any comparisons, in detail, between the state of France in 1791, and the condition it was in two or three centuries ago." He promptly revoked the second part of his declared intention by asking whether France had any better constitution in 1791 than in 1572, which he answered in the negative but without offering a word of explanation.[53]

Now abandoning his commentary on Davila, he shifted his focus to observe that many writers had "imputed [civil] contentions to republican governments, as if they were peculiar to them," an error that he found in both monarchical and republican authors, including two of his favorite republicans, Niccolò Machiavelli and Jean De Lolme. Adams vigorously disputed this contention. Political rivalries, he argued, were not peculiar to any one class—Machiavelli had blamed certain great "fatal families"—nor were they confined to any one form of government. They were common everywhere in Europe, Asia, and Africa. The underlying cause, human emulation and ambition, was ubiquitous, as his earlier "Davila" essays had demonstrated. Only in republics, however, could "emulation, which God and nature have implanted in the human heart for the wisest and best purposes," be "directed to honor and virtue, and then nourished, cherished, and cultivated." Both "emulation between individuals, and rivalries among families never can be prevented." Indeed, they "ought not to be prevented, but directed to virtue, and then stimulated and encouraged by generous applause and honorable rewards." To this end, "an effectual control [must] be provided in the constitution, to check [the excesses of contending forces] and balance their weights." This thirty-first essay was a suitable thematic conclusion to a commentary that Adams had not in fact completed; it is probably for this reason that both the 1805 edition of *Davila* and Charles Francis Adams's republication of it in John Adams's *Works* chose to terminate the argument at this point.[54]

But John Adams did not end his "Davila" essays there. The last sentence of essay 31, which the later editions did include, referred without explanation to one "Stephen Boethius." Adams's brief thirty-second essay was essentially an introduction to the political theory of this Boethius (Étienne de La Boétie), whose 1548 *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, also called *Contr'un* [Discourse on Voluntary Servitude, or Against the One] was a sharp assault on the rule of kings and nobles. Adams argued that Frenchmen who favored rule by a unitary national legislature should acknowledge that their first debt was not to Turgot, Rochefoucauld, or Condorcet, but to Boethius, who had preceded them by more than two centuries. He was hardly endorsing this earlier argument, but he did admire its originality and skill in attacking monarchy and aristocracy. He only regretted that Boethius, who had "discovered so much ingenuity in reasoning against the one and the few, had not told the many how they should govern themselves."[55]

Adams's abiding hostility to unitary government is evident throughout this last published essay (and in his unpublished thirty-third essay). He did in

fairness mention Boethius's own denunciations of the intemperance of the multitude, but he characterized the larger argument in nearly the same language he had used against Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* fifteen years earlier: "He is for pulling down, but shows not how to build up." He conceded, however, that as the French appeared determined to embrace rule by their unicameral National Assembly as the sole representative of the Many, their Revolution was "an experiment which must be fully tried and found beneficial before it can be approved." Adams's personal expectations for that experiment were clear from over fifteen years of argument in speeches, pamphlets, the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, and the *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*. But Boethius now intrigued him more than Davila, so he concluded his "Discourses" by declaring that, "as the reader will be more entertained and instructed by the discourse of Boethius, than with the discourse on Davila, he shall no longer be detained from it." This was no throwaway line. Over the next two months the *Gazette* published an English translation of Boethius's *Discours de la servitude voluntaire*. Like the "Davila" essays, the translation was unsigned, and never completed. Unlike "Davila," the text contained no commentary by its quite certain translator, John Adams.[56]

It may seem odd that a work such as the "Discourses on Davila" would involve its author in partisan conflict and play a major role in damaging his political reputation in the young republic. Most of its text appears far removed from the immediate concerns of American political life in the 1790s. Adams's chosen subject, a work on sixteenth-century French history that few Americans would even have heard of, and which far fewer would ever have read, seems an unlikely catalyst for political controversy. C. Bradley Thompson, the leading contemporary interpreter of both Adams's *Defence of the Constitutions* and his "Discourses on Davila," sees a conscious design in Adams's decision to comment on Davila's *Historia delle Guerre civili*, a work that he views as playing the same role for Adams that the first ten books of Livy's history of Rome did in Niccolò Machiavelli's *Discourses*. But it seems unlikely that many even well-informed readers of the 1790s would have made this connection, particularly in light of Thompson's own survey that established how few prominent American political leaders, apart from John Adams himself, had ever read or even thought about any work by Machiavelli, with the exception of his notorious *The Prince*. Finally, in making his argument, Adams followed the best traditions of Enlightenment scholarship. His "Discourses," nominally concerned with civil wars whose competing factions often appealed to religious loyalties and recruited sectarian forces, was consistently secular and republican. He treated Catholic and Protestant leaders equally harshly and argued from first to last that what France most needed, irrespective of its sectarian divisions, was a balanced constitution built upon a strong executive and an effective bicameral legislature.[57]

Yet the fact remains that his "Davila" essays did land Adams in hot water in republican America, and several features of his argument, however esoteric their historical setting, go far to explain his difficulties with his countrymen. Both in his brief comments on Davila's narrative and at greater length in his more personal and creative essays early in the series, Adams defended two propositions that were becoming anathema to America's rising Democratic-Republican forces. As he had done consistently for several years, he stressed the need in any sound republic for a powerful executive, although he made less of this argument in "Davila" than he had in his *Defence of the Constitutions*, or in his 1789 letters to Roger Sherman, perhaps because all the contending parties in sixteenth-century France assumed the necessity of a strong monarchy and differed only in who they thought should possess it. More important was Adams's preference in "Davila" for family over wealth as a basis for an aristocracy that would contribute to a stable republic—a preference that he soon repeated in his correspondence with Samuel Adams in the fall of 1790 (sect. 3, below). This preference, and indeed virtually all of the economic and social beliefs that John Adams had developed over the past three decades, pushed his political prescriptions in favor of the community over the individual, just at the point that his political opponents were moving in the opposite direction.

Closely related to Adams's social convictions were two other features of his "Davila" essays that could only offend many American republicans. The first was Adams's deep skepticism toward and general lack of respect for the ongoing French Revolution. In the early stages of that political conflict, at least until the execution of Louis XVI in January 1793, most Americans who initially looked upon the idealistic reformers in Paris with favor believed that, despite a few setbacks and occasional shocking events, France would soon become an essentially modern state, either as a constitutional monarchy or as a republic. John Adams was one of the first Americans, in his "Davila" essays, to doubt that happy outcome. The years 1790 and 1791 were too early to vindicate his reservations but not too soon to arouse the resentment of many Americans who had the fondest hopes for the drama unfolding in Paris.

Even more important in undermining Adams's political reputation, however, was the principal belief that lay behind all of his opinions in "Davila," that the essential role of government was "to set bounds to passions which nature has not limited." The necessity for this control was not, in Adams's view, because this passion for distinction was sinful. John Adams was not a Calvinist thinker; his "Davila" was a thoroughly Enlightenment work, not a neo-Puritan tract.[58] Indeed, as he made clear in the early essays, the passion for distinction was the driving force behind all human achievement. But man's burning ambition, creative as it was, inevitably led to rivalries between individual men, and between groups of men of every size and description, that no amount of religion or moral

education could control. Only a strong government could both curb its citizens' individual ambitions and establish rewards for those who were willing to direct their passion for distinction to public purposes.

The impact of these arguments—for largely family-based aristocracies, for community over the individual, for a pronounced skepticism toward the future of the French Revolution, and for a strong government to control man's basic nature—even when they were embedded in a treatise on a relatively obscure historical work, was soon evident. Writing years later, Adams remarked that he decided to cease publishing "Davila" when "the rage and fury of the Jacobinical journals against these discourses, increased as they proceeded, intimidated the printer, John Fenno, and convinced me, that to proceed would do more harm than good."[59] This was certainly not the whole story behind his determination to end a series in which he had essentially lost interest. But by the time he made this decision, in April 1791, an unforeseen event, the sudden appearance of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* in Philadelphia, prompted Thomas Jefferson, in his heady enthusiasm for Paine's spirited republican polemic, to involve Adams's "Discourses" in the latest contest between Democratic Republicans and Federalists: a battle of words that pitted Paine's work against Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Some six months before the outbreak of this controversy, however, John Adams engaged in a more private defense of his republican convictions that may have had some effect on the contentions of 1791 and probably did harm his reputation later in the decade.

3. Adams versus Adams on Aristocracy and the People

In August 1790, shortly after John Adams had completed his twelve-essay detour from his commentary on Davila's *History* to explore the sources of political behavior in human nature (with an assist from Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*), the second session of the First Federal Congress adjourned, and the federal government prepared to move from New York to Philadelphia. To find a suitable residence, Adams took a brief trip to the new capital. Immediately upon his return he received a letter of recommendation from his cousin, Massachusetts's lieutenant governor, Samuel Adams. The letter, and the memories of the nearly three years the cousins had spent together at the Continental Congress in Philadelphia (1774–77), stirred up by John's first visit to that city in thirteen years, prompted a brief reply. John ended his response of 12 September with a passionate reference to the ongoing French Revolution:

> What, my old friend, is this world about to become? Is the millennium commencing? Are the kingdoms of it about to be governed by reason? Your Boston town meetings and our Harvard College have set the universe in motion. Every thing will be pulled down. So much seems certain. But what will be built up? Are there any principles of political architecture? What are they?

> Were Voltaire and Rousseau masters of them? Are their disciples acquainted with them? Locke taught them principles of liberty. But I doubt whether they have not yet to learn the principles of government. Will the struggle in Europe be any thing more than a change of impostors and impositions?[60]

On 4 October, cousin Samuel took the bait. He promptly agreed with John that "every thing will be pulled down," and after a quick review of the tyrannies and oppressions of human history, he concluded that neither revolutions nor new constitutions had ever had the power to do more than bring on John's "change of imposters and impositions." Only a rigorous education in Christian principles, he declared, could bring an end to this march of human folly by creating a virtuous political culture that could usher in the millennium. If and when that millennium ever occurred, Samuel hoped that, if there were still a need for government, it would be "in the republican form, or something better."[61]

John's reply of 18 October, one of his longest and most revealing private letters, brought the two cousins, political comrades for two decades, into open disagreement over the fundamental nature and role of republican government. John began by agreeing with Samuel's support for moral education, but thought it unwise "to place all your hopes in the universal, or at least more general, prevalence of knowledge and benevolence." He concurred with David Hume, "that all projects of government, founded in the supposition or expectation of extraordinary degrees of virtue, are evidently chimerical." His own favored "project of government," like that of his cousin, was republican, but he stipulated: "Whenever I use the word *republic* with approbation, I mean a government in which the people have collectively, or by representation, an essential share in the sovereignty." He concluded his objection to Samuel's reliance on moral education by saying that he thought it would "confirm mankind in the opinion of the necessity of preserving and strengthening the dikes against the ocean, its tides and storms. Human appetites, passions, prejudices, and self-love will never be conquered by benevolence and knowledge alone, introduced by human means."[62]

To this point, John's argument was thoroughly predictable. He had voiced his belief in the indispensability of sound government since the 1760s and had accorded to the people a share—not the whole—of republican sovereignty in the first volume of his *Defence of the Constitutions* in 1787. But John was not through contradicting his cousin. Samuel, he thought, had been too critical of the role of aristocracy in the long historic struggle to achieve free government. He agreed that whenever they had enjoyed unchecked power, aristocrats had "waged everlasting war against the common rights of men." But so had the people, kings, and "human nature, in every shape and combination," whenever they, too, were unchecked. The nobles, by whom he meant "not particularly an hereditary

nobility, or any particular modification, but the natural and actual aristocracy among mankind," had also been "essential parties in the preservation of liberty, whenever and wherever it existed." Samuel had expressed frustration that rights the people had once won were so often taken away from them by kings and lords, and asked: "Were the people of England free, after they had forced King John to concede to them their ancient rights and liberties?" But John replied that it was not the people who had won these rights in Magna Carta, but the nobles, who had sought these blessings only for themselves.[63]

The key to aristocratic power, both in England and in America, John argued, was not the family pride of which Samuel complained, but family popularity. Leading families could easily impress the people everywhere; "as long as gratitude or interest, ambition or avarice, love, hope, or fear, shall be human motives of action, so long will numbers attach themselves to particular families." He then inquired, "When a man or family are thus popular, how can you prevent them from being proud?" But in their pride, he conceded, many leading families took advantage of their popularity to oppress the people. For this, there was but one remedy—which John had earlier proposed in the *Defence*—"to put these families in a hole by themselves, and set two watches upon them; a superior to them all on one side, and the people on the other."[64]

At the time of King John, and for some centuries thereafter, John Adams explained, the people were too weak to defend their rights and had to support either a strong monarch or powerful nobles in the most subservient manner. But in the recent history of both England and America, the people, having grown more economically independent, could constitutionally defend themselves by entering into a tripartite balance of power with the executive and the aristocracy, each of which had its distinct powers. This balance was the essence of every republic. John, like his cousin, deplored the puffed up titles, all variations on the conceit of being "the well born" that aristocrats everywhere gave themselves, even in America. But he ended his letter with an appeal that could not set well with his republican neighbors:

> Let us be impartial. There is not more of family pride on one side, than of vulgar malignity and popular envy on the other. Popularity in one family raises envy in others. But the popularity of the least deserving will triumph over envy and malignity; while that which is acquired by real merit, will very often be overborne and oppressed by it.
>
> Let us do justice to the people and to the nobles; for nobles there are in Boston as well as in Madrid. But to do justice to both, you must establish an arbitrator between them.[65]

On 20 November, Samuel Adams reacted to his cousin's argument with *his* longest letter in this exchange. He began by questioning a major point of John's argument: "A republic, you tell me, is a government in which 'the people have

an essential *share* in the sovereignty.' Is not the *whole* sovereignty, my friend, essentially in the people?" Samuel proceeded to defend his position vigorously and quoted the opening words of the United States Constitution, "We, the people." But he seems not to have understood his cousin's definition of "the people," which Samuel, like most Americans in 1790, saw as a good republican label for the whole politically active population, but which John persisted in limiting to politically engaged citizens below the aristocracy. The rest of Samuel's letter was devoted to an orthodox defense of the balance of powers in American governments, state and federal, as they existed, and to a repetition of his disgust at the pride and oppression of nobles everywhere. He did concede John's argument that there was a natural aristocracy, in America as elsewhere, but he believed that republican education was the cure for aristocratic pretensions. And he expressed little concern over that malignity and envy of the people of which John had complained. Samuel never did fully engage with his cousin's concept of the people, but in this regard he was on the same page as virtually all of John's countrymen.[66]

John Adams's letter of 18 October, the heart of his exchange with his cousin Samuel, is remarkable for two reasons. It was both the strongest defense of a positive role for a natural aristocracy in republican government and the most extensive and critical set of observations on the people that he had ever written. The causes of his candor cannot be established with certainty, but two possibilities suggest themselves. First, he had just completed the dozen "Davila" essays that had thoroughly explored the universal human passion for distinction, which he saw as the driving force behind both aristocratic achievement and popular envy. Second, he was daily witnessing the rising tide of popular criticism of both Federalist policies and Federalist leaders, even including President Washington. The vice president himself, shackled speechless to the presiding officer's chair in the Senate, had been a target of popular criticism since his advocacy of an elevated title of respect for America's chief executive. In 1790 John Adams was in an increasingly isolated position, both politically and intellectually, an isolation to which his "Davila" essays contributed and to which his correspondence with both Roger Sherman and Samuel Adams testified.

4. Jefferson and Paine versus Adams and Son

On 26 April 1791, the day before John Adams's last "Davila" essay appeared in John Fenno's *Gazette of the United States*, Thomas Jefferson sent Jonathan Bayard Smith a copy of Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* (part I), recently published in London, which James Madison had loaned him. Knowing that the volume was to be immediately employed by Smith's brother to prepare the first American edition of Paine's radical polemic, Jefferson included a personal note to Smith, to express his pleasure that the work "will be re-printed here, and that something at length is to be publicly said against the political heresies which

have sprung up among us." Without Jefferson's knowledge, the printer affixed his remark as a prefatory endorsement to the new edition, which appeared in early May. Thus began two closely related battles in the press of the young republic. The larger controversy erupted between the Democratic-Republican supporters of Thomas Paine and the French Revolution and the Federalist supporters of Edmund Burke, whose recent, critical *Reflections on the Revolution in France* had prompted Paine's reply. In a more personal conflict, several of these same Democratic Republicans began to attack John Adams, whose supposedly anonymous "Davila" essays were widely believed to express "the political heresies" of which Jefferson complained.[67]

Almost as soon as the American edition of *The Rights of Man* appeared, Jefferson tried to disavow his endorsement, not because he wished to qualify his political sentiments but because, he declared to several correspondents, he had never imagined that his private remark would become public. He was understandably concerned that its publication might destroy the long personal friendship with Adams that he still valued, despite their political differences. But of greater importance, his correspondence suggests, was his fear that the insinuating character of his endorsement of Paine's volume threatened to saddle him with a public reputation that he abhorred, that of a highly personal polemicist. He immediately wrote to President Washington and to his friend and ally James Madison to protest the innocence of his intentions, without denying his political sentiments to either man. In evident embarrassment and uncertainty, however, he delayed writing to Adams for more than two months. Well before he faced that difficult task, Jefferson and several of his political allies had become convinced that a spirited critique of his support for Paine's *Rights of Man*, appearing as a series of essays in a Boston newspaper beginning in June under the name "Publicola," was by John Adams himself. Just before writing to Adams, however, Jefferson received a letter from Madison, who speculated accurately that "Publicola" was not John Adams but his son, John Quincy.[68]

Thomas Jefferson's letter to John Adams of 17 July 1791 opened a dramatic exchange that severely strained their sixteen-year friendship, which thereafter limped along until 1796, and then seemingly expired until their unexpected reconciliation in 1812, after both men had left public life. Jefferson composed his opening letter with care; he was candid and sincere in forthrightly admitting his political disagreements with his old friend, while expressing his deep feeling of mortification that his private note to Smith had become a public condemnation of Adams's views. He closed the most personal part of his letter by imploring Adams to believe that he had never intended their differences to become public, before moving on to observations on events of the day.[69]

Adams began his reply, of 29 July, in kind. Displaying his appealing capacity, noted by one of his most sensitive biographers, for ignoring minor slights and even forgiving unmistakable offenses by old friends, he began by receiving

Jefferson's "friendly Letter . . . with great pleasure" and promptly gave "full credit to your relation of the manner in which your note was written and prefixed to the Philadelphia edition of Mr. Paine's pamphlet on the rights of Man." But Adams was so distressed by the partisan criticism that had been directed at him since the American edition of *The Rights of Man* appeared in May that he immediately abandoned his good humor to lament at length the damage that the endorsed volume had done to his reputation, citing mainstream journalism, a libelous squib in a Connecticut newspaper, and even a recent public speech by his cousin Samuel Adams. And although Jefferson had not raised the issue, John added that he was not "Publicola"; the author of those essays, whom he did not identify, "followed his own Judgment, Information, and discretion, without any Assistance from me." More remarkably, Adams responded to Jefferson's statement, "That you and I differ in our Ideas of the best form of Government is well known to Us both," by asserting that "you will give me leave to Say, that I do not know this. I know not what your Idea is of the best form of Government. You and I have never had a Serious conversation together that I can recollect concerning the nature of Government." Near the close of his letter, he ventured that it "was high time that you and I should come to an explanation with each other," an appeal he would repeat, more poignantly, some two decades later.[70]

Unaware of the full implications of his letter, Adams had demanded more than his old friend was prepared to give. In 1791, Jefferson was not seeking the deeper understanding that an old friendship might call forth but a mere accommodation that would allow each man to move along his own political path without interruption. To try to achieve this end, Jefferson responded on 30 August, with one of those masterful feats of obfuscation that he sometimes displayed when he had to fend off a valid criticism that he could not face directly. He began by thanking Adams for accepting his statement of his innocent intentions in writing the brief note of approval to Paine's *Rights of Man* but proceeded to argue that his endorsement of that volume would not have damaged Adams's reputation had not "Publicola"'s attack on Paine, and upon himself, opened up the controversy. That essayist, he continued, "had thought proper to misconstrue a figurative expression in my note," which could only refer to Jefferson's reference to "the political heresies which have sprung up among us." He then remarked that "[Publicola's] antagonists, very criminally in my opinion, presumed you to be Publicola, and on that presumption hazarded a personal attack on you." Jefferson found the entire affair distressing, but he concluded that "my note contributed nothing to the production of these disagreeable pieces" and hoped that Adams would see him "to have been as innocent *in effect* as I was in intention."[71]

Now Jefferson was asking too much of Adams. He expected his old friend to agree that the whole war of words was the fault of "Publicola" (whom Jefferson had to know was Adams's own son), despite clear evidence that his

"figurative expression"—"political heresies"—was immediately read by Democratic Republicans as Jefferson's reference to Adams's "Davila" essays. Perhaps Adams was simply at a loss to know what to make of such an implausible argument; for whatever reason, he made no reply, and for the next two years the once rich Adams-Jefferson correspondence contracted to occasional notes imparting a minimum of essential information, utterly devoid of opinions or emotion, although from 1794 to 1796, when Jefferson was in retirement in Monticello, the two exchanged a few more personal and substantial letters. It would be interesting to speculate how Adams would have reacted to the 30 August letter had he known that Jefferson had openly admitted to his partisan friends that his "political heresies" indeed referred to Adams's "Davila" essays and that among "Publicola"'s antagonists who had presumed, "very criminally in my opinion," that Adams was "Publicola" was Thomas Jefferson himself.[72]

This brief but remarkably candid exchange of views—and the correspondents' mutual failure to understand those views—is highly revealing of the opinions, characters, and personalities of two of America's greatest political figures. But the Jefferson-Paine-Adams affair of 1791 is even more revealing to anyone who would understand the increasingly controversial role of John Adams's republican thought in republican America. Jefferson's characterization of the principles developed in the "Discourses on Davila" as "political heresies" was not the first public attack on John Adams's constitutional ideas.[73] Moreover, both legislative gossip and published squibs in New York had already skewered Adams for his ardent support of executive titles in 1789. But because the veiled reference to the "Davila" essays was by Thomas Jefferson, America's secretary of state and a rapidly emerging leader, with James Madison, of the opposition to Alexander Hamilton's fiscal policies, it gained an immediate and widespread currency among Democratic-Republican critics of the Federalist administration.

Despite Thomas Jefferson's denials to John Adams, his hope that Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* would counter "the political heresies which have sprung up among us" was soon answered, well before the appearance of the first "Publicola" essay, by a thoughtful critique of Adams's "Davila." Both Jefferson and his editor, Julian Boyd, were correct in seeing "Publicola"'s criticism of Paine as an attack on Jefferson's endorsement of Paine, and thereby a defense of John Adams. But the direct assault on "Davila" had already begun. The opening shot was fired not in Philadelphia but in Poughkeepsie, New York, where in mid-May "A Customer," carefully concealing his identity, attacked both Adams's *Defence of the Constitutions* and his recent "Discourses." After conceding the vice president's many useful public services and praising his support for the separation of powers between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, he declared that "his writings have also inculcated, cherished, and propagated one abominable *heresy* that monarchy and aristocracy are compatible with permanent

freedom, and probably essential to a wise, happy, and perfectly balanced constitution." "A Customer" was also the first public voice to charge that Adams, "since his residence in Europe," had undergone "a very great change in his political principles."[74]

The essays of "Publicola" were undoubtedly more effective in bringing the Jefferson-Paine-Adams controversy into wider public view than the early effort of "A Customer" in Poughkeepsie. "Publicola" sparked immediate responses by several Democratic-Republican writers, not first in Philadelphia or New York, but in the Boston press. But "A Customer," whose two essays, of May and June, were reprinted in the *New-York Journal* in July, shows that the strong criticism of John Adams's recent political views voiced in intimate conversations and private letters by Benjamin Rush, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and a few other prominent figures, beginning no later than March 1790, before the appearance of Adams's first "Davila" essay, was beginning to move out from the capital.[75]

Three features of "A Customer"'s first essay, of 20 May 1791, suggest how intertwined Adams's recent career and political opinions, and Jefferson's view of those opinions, had become in Democratic-Republican political circles. Least significant, and perhaps merely coincidental with Jefferson's endorsement of Paine, is "A Customer"'s characterization of Adams's endorsement of monarchy and aristocracy as an "abominable *heresy*" (although the key word is italicized in the original text). More important is his conviction that Adams's political views had changed "since his residence in Europe." Most striking, however, is "A Customer"'s conviction that for John Adams, monarchy and aristocracy were not only "compatible with permanent freedom" but "probably essential to a wise, happy, and perfectly balanced constitution." One could derive these convictions from Adams's *Defence of the Constitutions*, but they were far more concisely stated in his early "Davila" essays in 1790.

There is no yardstick to measure the amount of damage that Jefferson's endorsement of Paine's *Rights of Man* may have done to Vice President John Adams's reputation. Nor is it known whether either Roger Sherman or Samuel Adams, in conversation or in private letters, had reported the sentiments that John Adams had candidly shared with them in 1789 and 1790, although Samuel Adams's willingness to express his disapproval of his cousin's views in a public address in 1791 suggests that he had faithfully remembered their correspondence. What is clear is the sudden movement of a cool reception to the vice president's views from out of the shadows of elite drawing rooms from Virginia to Massachusetts, and from off the pages of elite private correspondence, into the public sphere in the weekly press of New York, Boston, and even Poughkeepsie. Anger and dismay at Adams's evidently novel political opinions had in fact begun, largely out of public view, immediately upon the arrival of his *Defence of the Constitutions* in Philadelphia in April 1787. It grew steadily, still in private, from the vice president's involvement in the executive titles controversy in 1789

through the whole course of his "Davila" essays in 1790 and 1791, until it suddenly burst upon the public scene with Jefferson's endorsement of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*.[76]

From this point, in the spring and summer of 1791, John Adams would exercise a stricter control over his pen and his speech than he had done since his diplomatic service in France and Holland had ended. With that control came a new caution, a wariness in John Adams as he faced a second national election to fill executive offices in 1792, amid the deepening partisan feelings that had begun to affect many political leaders who had long been his friends and allies.

5. John Adams as a Republican Executive

In December 1793, as he began presiding over the first session of the Third Federal Congress, Vice President John Adams penned one of the two most frequently quoted characterizations of the novel public post that he occupied: "My Country has in its Wisdom contrived for me, the most insignificant Office that ever the Invention of Man contrived or his Imagination conceived."[77] This sour sentiment was Adams's considered judgment on four years of bitter disappointment. To list only those events that are known to have cast him in a negative light during those years, one must include Alexander Hamilton's maneuvers to deny him electoral college votes (winter of 1789); his embarrassing involvement in the futile effort to secure an elevated title of address for the president (April–May 1789); the Senate's determination to deny him, as the body's mere presiding officer, the right enjoyed exclusively by its members to speak on issues that came before it (spring and summer of 1789); his being publicly labeled an advocate of hereditary monarchy and family-based aristocracy in his "Davila" essays (April–July 1791); and his exclusion, during nearly this entire period, from the major deliberations of President Washington's administration.

Yet Adams's decision to stand for reelection as vice president in the fall of 1792, even under such humiliating conditions, cannot be surprising. The entire course of his public career and the sum of his most intimate feelings, imparted to his diary and to family correspondents both prior to and during that career, testify that the ardent desire for fame in the public arena that he felt as early as 1760 continued to dominate his behavior. He was still eager to succeed George Washington, and he believed that the vice presidency, powerless as it was, was still the most visible office from which to stand for president whenever Washington should tire of the post. To have left public life in 1793, just short of the highest position in his nation's government, and particularly at a time when he was enduring harsh public criticism, would surely have seemed to Adams like abandoning his career under fire before it was properly finished. It would also have left the future of the republic, after Washington's departure, in the hands of men in whose wisdom and ability he did not have the highest confidence.[78]

When Adams became vice president in 1789, he probably did not expect to have to wait for eight long, boring years to claim the top prize. In the spring of 1792, Washington seriously contemplated retiring at the end of his first term, and only the persuasion of his political friends and advisers and his concern for the increasingly partisan state of national politics convinced him that he should shoulder the burdens of office for another four years. For Adams, the cost of waiting to assume office, both physical and psychological, was perhaps as great as the cost of deferring retirement was for the general. In the Senate, sitting mute in the presiding officer's chair, he had to bite his tongue on a daily basis as one senator after another, nearly all his junior in years, and all his junior in depth and breadth of experience, rose to spout off nonsense on issue after issue that he was convinced he understood, from his years in Congress in the 1770s and his service in Europe in the 1780s, far better than they. But whenever he imagined that he might enlighten a pointless Senate debate, he had to catch himself and remember that "it cannot be done." He had become a "'head of wood,' a mere mechanical tool to wind up the clock."[79]

Adams would express his frustration only to his closest correspondents: to his wife, Abigail, to his children, and to a few of his oldest, least politically involved friends. To these intimates he frankly deplored the French Revolution and asserted that his recent historical and constitutional writings, both his *Defence of the Constitutions* and his "Davila" essays, correctly predicted and diagnosed all the current political disasters in both Europe and America. But in public, from the summer of 1791 until his inauguration as America's second president in March 1797, Adams was politically silent. In these six years he was careful to say nothing of his distinctive republican ideology, and he published nothing on any subject, whether under his own name, over a pseudonym, or anonymously. In a period filled with the most dramatic public events—in America, the triumph of Hamilton's Bank of the United States, Washington's Declaration of Neutrality, Jefferson's resignation from the administration, the Whiskey Rebellion, and the popular furor over the Jay Treaty; and in France, the execution of Louis XVI, the proclamation of the Republic, the Reign of the Terror, and war with Austria, Prussia, and Britain—Adams dutifully supported President Washington and kept his own counsel.[80]

Even those few public events that touched John Adams directly drew only his discreet observations to friends and family. The most gratifying of these was his reelection as vice president in 1792, this time with a clear majority of the electoral votes, and without Alexander Hamilton's meddling resistance. More surprising, but just as pleasing, was Washington's appointment of his son John Quincy to be resident minister to the Netherlands in May 1794. John took this as a mark of pure appreciation for the merit and ability of his son, and he assured John Quincy, in utter sincerity, that he had played no part in the president's decision. But these moments of public pleasure were few, and as John

Adams approached the year 1796, when it appeared likely that he would finally get his chance to sit in the executive's chair, his political isolation and his silence were unrelieved.[81]

John Adams's presidency has never been judged the most brilliant chapter in his long public career. When he retired from office in March 1801, he was disrespected, hated, and even reviled by many Federalists and virtually all Democratic Republicans, if for quite different reasons. Several Federalist leaders, most common citizens in New England, and many inhabitants of the Mid-Atlantic and upper southern states still did respect him, but probably a majority of Americans felt that, at the least, he had handled his duties ineptly and been insensitive to the needs and feelings of his countrymen.

The ensuing two centuries have been kinder to John Adams. Several historians have seen his political problems as part of a larger and, many would argue, a well-deserved collapse of Federalist forces at the end of the 1790s. His principal achievement, avoiding an open war with France and concluding a lasting treaty with that nation in the face of massive resistance by Federalist leaders in Congress and even in his own cabinet, is now widely seen as a wise and courageous move of great benefit to the vulnerable young republic. In recent decades, historians and political scientists who have engaged in polls that rank the achievement of America's presidents have given John Adams relatively high marks. On these ordered lists he now resides securely in the second tier of strong and effective executives, although decidedly below the top half dozen "great" American presidents, which in nearly every poll includes both the principal object of his political envy, George Washington, and his greatest political rival, Thomas Jefferson.[82]

The difficulties of John Adams's presidency began with his contentious election to that office. The "campaign," such as it was, opened in mid-September 1796, when President Washington published his "Farewell Address," announcing his decision to retire. Because no possible successor enjoyed Washington's broad national appeal, and every possible successor was widely regarded as a highly partisan supporter of either Federalist or Democratic-Republican policies on taxes and debt, finance and banking, and Britain and France, the election of 1796 quickly became America's first presidential contest. Adams's "campaign," like that of every contender for electoral votes that fall, was still run under eighteenth-century rules, and thus cost him nothing in direct expenses and made only modest demands on his time. Political supporters, high and low, would canvas other potential supporters, openly or secretly, on behalf of whomever they favored, while each candidate kept a respectful silence. There were no national campaign managers or campaign staffs, and in Adams's case, at least, it appears improbable that there were significant conversations or communications between the vice president and his various local supporters about either issues or strategy.[83]

But this polite procedure had a hidden cost. Every candidate remained uncertain, until the final outcome, just who would support him. Because several local and state political leaders who would determine the makeup of the Electoral College, and a few of the electors themselves, were men whom Adams had known, worked closely with, and regarded as friends for years, the relatively disorganized but sharply contested election of 1796 brought on an agonizing fear of disloyalty and betrayal that he could not dismiss, but simply had to endure until the contest's end. A particularly trying case was that of Thomas McKean, whom Adams had known and respected since their first service together in the Continental Congress in 1774 and who was now an elector from Pennsylvania. In early December 1796, as the electors cast their ballots, he wrote to Abigail that his "Feelings of Friendship excite a Curiosity to know how McKean will vote." Shortly thereafter he confessed: "Nothing affects me so much as to see [friends] sett up in opposition to me." But McKean supported Thomas Jefferson, leaving Adams to conclude: "All Confidence between Man and Man is suspended for a Time."[84]

The suspense ended in late December, when it became certain that Adams would secure a narrow victory over Jefferson in the Electoral College. When the ballots were opened and counted in February 1797, Adams received 71 votes to his rival's 68. The South Carolina Federalist Thomas Pinckney, secretly favored over Adams by Alexander Hamilton and his High Federalist allies, received 59 votes, and the electors scattered 78 votes among ten other candidates, including Samuel Adams, now openly a Democratic Republican. This was hardly a strong show of confidence for John Adams, particularly following the Electoral College's repeated unanimous approval of George Washington. Moreover, the highly uneven distribution of support for the leading candidates among the states brought into stark relief a disturbing sectional pattern that had already been visible in the electors' second votes—all those not cast for Washington—in 1788 and 1792, and which would become a prominent feature in the majority of presidential elections over the entire course of the nation's history. Adams received one vote from every elector in the seven states east and north of the Delaware River, as well as several votes from Maryland and Delaware. But only one elector each from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Carolina supported him; South Carolina, Georgia, and the new western states, Kentucky and Tennessee, quite ignored him. When he rose on 4 March 1797, after a sleepless night, to take the oath of office as America's second president, John Adams had good reason to be uncertain how he would be received that day, or over the four years ahead.[85]

If anyone doubted his acute awareness of the scrutiny he was under as he approached the podium in the House of Representatives' chamber, Adams's inaugural address dispelled that uncertainty. Washington, in his relatively brief first inaugural, had chosen to protest his unfitness for the great task before him,

to plead his obedience to his nation's call to duty as an excuse should his fellow citizens be disappointed in his performance in office, and to hope that "the benign Parent of the Human Race," who had so signally favored America's struggle for independence, would bless the new government. Adams took a different path. He opened with a brief view of the conflict with Britain that led to independence, followed by a description of the political and economic crisis of the Confederation era and a succinct statement of the nation's response, the drafting and ratifying of the federal Constitution.[86]

At this point, John Adams brought himself into the picture, noting that he first saw the Constitution while he was "employed in the service of my country abroad." But as a citizen, claiming a citizen's right to render judgment on the document "which was to rule me and my posterity, . . . I did not hesitate to express my approbation of it on all occasions, in public and in private." Such an affirmation of republican faith, however, was evidently not sufficient, for he continued: "It was not then, nor has been since, any objection to it in my mind that the executive and Senate were not more permanent. Nor have I ever entertained a thought of promoting any alteration in it but such as the people themselves, in the course of their experience, should see and feel to be necessary or expedient, and by their representatives in Congress and the state legislatures, according to the Constitution itself, adopt and ordain." He concluded his tribute to the Constitution by observing that its operation "has equaled the most sanguine expectations of its friends, and . . . I have acquired an habitual attachment to it and veneration for it." Here, at the midpoint of his address, he reached his rhetorical highpoint, as he asked: "What other form of government, indeed, can so well deserve our esteem and love?"[87]

John Adams had acquired a richly deserved reputation for honesty and candor in all his dealings and all his writings early in his long career, and this reputation has stood the test of some two centuries of professional scrutiny, as the present work has often testified. But on the occasion of his inauguration, Adams felt compelled to declare in public two things that were not exactly true. First, he had, immediately upon reading the Constitution in 1787, privately expressed his disapprobation of important clauses to Thomas Jefferson, who reciprocated by stating his disapproval of quite different clauses. More important, both in those letters to Jefferson and in others to Roger Sherman in 1789, Adams had indeed objected that the Constitution had not made the presidency a more powerful and permanent office, with additional powers and a provision for a single life-tenure election. Adams stated truthfully that he had never publicly advanced these views, and he had never contemplated making any alterations to the Constitution except by the procedure stated in that document's Article 5. But he may have feared that some of his listeners, perhaps remembering his *Defence of the Constitutions* and his "Davila" essays, were silently questioning his fidelity to the vision of the ideal republic set out in the Constitution. At least

one member of the audience on that inaugural day, the incoming vice president, Thomas Jefferson, could, if his memory was acute and his temper malicious, have challenged the exact truth of John Adams's declaration, although Adams could in turn have replied that Jefferson, too, had privately expressed strong reservations about the nation's new federal blueprint.[88]

The clear evidence that Adams felt deeply concerned at his inauguration to show that he was an orthodox republican, despite the deep respect for "republican monarchy" that he had paid in his writings, public and private, from 1786 through 1791, prompts the question: Just what kind of republican executive did President John Adams become in his four years in office? Because he wrote virtually nothing on political theory during his presidential term and, after his inaugural address, carefully refrained from making any reference to his earlier convictions, his actions must speak for him.[89]

The conflict in Europe that forced Adams to deal almost exclusively with a quasi war with France for nearly his entire term in office was not for him personally, as scholars have often implied, an unmitigated misfortune, but instead a great stroke of good luck. He had little interest in domestic policy and felt no love for either the Hamiltonian economic program of the High Federalists who dominated Congress or the financial wizard behind it. Adams accepted the necessity of the government's fiscal power to support the vulnerable young republic, but he had no more respect than did Jefferson or Madison for merchants and bankers, whom he regarded as among the most dangerous aristocrats of whom he had earlier written, and would write again in retirement. On the few occasions when he did allow America's quarrel with France to impinge on the domestic scene, by signing the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798, and then by harshly suppressing Fries's Rebellion against the direct land tax in 1799, he paid a heavy political price. Foreign policy itself, however, he understood perhaps better than any man in America. John Adams enjoyed a broader popular support during the first year of the quasi war than at any other point in his long public career, and after his popularity began to fade in 1799, he showed, to great advantage, the same dogged determination to defend his young nation on the dangerous international stage that he had displayed in Amsterdam and Paris in the 1780s.

Yet there is an evident contradiction between the all-powerful executive that dominated John Adams's political writings from 1775 to 1791 and the weaker, more isolated occupant of the presidency from 1797 to 1801. This disjuncture took two forms. While Adams's political theory, with its talk of republican monarchs, appeared extreme to many of his countrymen in the 1790s, his political behavior at nearly every point in his public career, including his presidency, was that of a pragmatic moderate, always near the center of the current political spectrum, rather than that of either an ideologue or a bold visionary.

More important was President Adams's profound political isolation. In pursuing his policies he made few overtures to leaders in Congress, either to the

Federalists, his nominal allies, or to the Democratic Republicans. Nor did he ever confront Congress with a veto, which, he had argued for nearly two decades in his political writings and correspondence, was the most important weapon that an American chief executive possessed, although in imperfect form, to defend executive power. (For the sake of his own historical reputation, Adams would have done well to veto at least one proposed law, the Sedition Act of 1798, but he never considered doing so. He had not the slightest idea of how that statute, so essentially indefensible in the larger context of American liberty, would look to later generations, even among his most ardent admirers.) He also took long vacations at his home in Massachusetts when his presence in the capital might have strengthened both his hand and his image. And he did not even command the respect of his own cabinet, of whose real loyalties he appeared either unconcerned or unaware until 1800, when he finally removed Secretary of State Timothy Pickering and Secretary of War James McHenry, two holdovers from Washington's administration who looked to Alexander Hamilton, rather than to him, for leadership. Only in his last nine months in office were most—but not all—of his department secretaries primarily loyal to him.[90]

Much of the apparent gulf between the exalted executive of his pen and the lonely, harassed, often denigrated figure sitting in the executive mansion was likely the result of Adams's relatively advanced age, of both his own and his wife's declining health, and of his resentments from eight years of frustration as a marginalized vice president. But was his behavior as president so thoroughly at odds with the ideal chef executive whose powers he had defended for so many years? John Adams's single stressful term in office may serve as an illustration of the real strengths and weaknesses of his imagined republican head of state. On the positive side of the ledger, both for him and for his country, he had always insisted on the need for the executive to check and balance the legislature, which was, he believed, especially in its more aristocratic upper house, the executive's natural enemy. Armed with this conviction, Adams resolutely stood his ground in 1799 and 1800 against the Federalist-led Congress and finally concluded a most beneficial peace with France.[91]

But in republican America, John Adams's vision of the executive had a major flaw. Because he saw the executive branch as an independent and fully equal part of a tripartite legislature—a part whose equality he believed the Framers of the Constitution should have validated by granting the president an absolute veto to match the negative power enjoyed by each branch of Congress—the occupant of that office could, and must, behave in a most independent manner. The president was free, of course, to consult with Congress whenever he wished to do so, but he was just as free to ignore both the leadership and the entire body of either or both houses, as well as the advice of his own cabinet. This was all very well in theory. In practice, however, an effective president in the 1790s, just as in every decade up to the present, has needed to relate to Congress directly

and frequently, not simply by means of formal messages and addresses, which John Adams dutifully prepared, but through informal meetings with key leaders and small groups of the members. Even the temperamentally aloof George Washington understood this, as has every successive president who has been regarded as an exceptionally effective executive, from Jefferson and Lincoln to both Roosevelts and Lyndon Johnson.

If John Adams had appreciated the necessity for the executive to relate to the legislature, of which he always believed the executive to be an integral part, and had he been able to shape his behavior in accordance with this understanding, he would probably have been a more effective president. He might also have won reelection and further enhanced his presidential reputation. But whatever some ideal John Adams might have done, the real John Adams did not approach the election of 1800 in the best of spirits. As early as May, he had good reason to fear that Thomas Jefferson would defeat him. By the fall, when he had thoroughly alienated many High Federalist leaders who would have been expected to support him, their real leader, Alexander Hamilton, attacked him in print.[92]

Despite this schism in the Federalist ranks, the presidential campaign of 1800 was ultimately far more organized than the contest of 1796. At the local level and in the press, it was even more rhetorically heated and nasty than its predecessor. But unlike 1796, in which more than a dozen national and regional candidates received some electoral support, the contest in 1800 was so sharply polarized, and its contending parties were so highly disciplined, that an observer of the balloting who did not know the provisions of the early Electoral College could well have concluded, before the deadlock between Jefferson and Burr in the House of Representatives, that the Twelfth Amendment requiring electors to designate candidates for president and vice president, which was not approved until 1803, was already the law of the land. America's new national parties had, in a few short years, become so effective that both Democratic-Republican candidates, Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr, received 73 votes, and the Federalist incumbent John Adams, despite Alexander Hamilton's machinations, just barely edged out his Federalist colleague, Charles Coatesworth Pinckney, 65 to 64, with the sole remaining vote going to John Jay. Party politics, so feared by both Washington and Adams, had finally triumphed in the young republic. The sharp regional division of 1796, however, persisted, with Adams and Pinckney drawing nearly all their support from north of the Potomac River, while Jefferson and Burr swept the southern states, split Maryland and Pennsylvania with their Federalist opponents, and won the contest with the electors Burr brought in from New York.[93]

John Adams did want to win reelection in 1800; his depression and anger in the decade following his defeat prove that point. But he had never sought popular approval, and he always believed that lasting fame, which he had avidly pursued over four full decades, was the reward for real achievement that men of

discernment would ultimately recognize. What was most important to John Adams in 1800 was not electoral victory but his successful conclusion of a treaty with France that would guarantee the safety of his vulnerable young republic, an achievement that should earn him the eternal gratitude of that republic. If he had a quarrel with his countrymen in 1800, its cause was their inability to appreciate the sacrifices he had made on their behalf.

6. The Public Triumph and Private Isolation of a Singular Republican

The contentious first decade of America's new federal republic provided a more hospitable environment for John Adams's public career than he expected at its outset. It culminated in the presidency of his nation, an office that he felt was simply his due for his exceptional political virtue and his long and arduous services to his nation, but which he never imagined he would attain—or wished to attain—from any popularity with his countrymen. But in this same decade, John Adams the political thinker grew more isolated, both from the broad American public and from the small circle of national leaders with whom he daily associated—or self-consciously avoided. His brilliant political and constitutional writings of the 1770s were largely forgotten, even by his oldest and closest colleagues, while stories of his diplomatic battles with his American colleagues in the 1780s and the controversial reputation of his magnum opus, *A Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*, were fresh in the minds of both his admirers and his detractors. A decade's worth of European baggage—both acquired and self-generated—that accompanied John Adams on his arrival in Boston in 1788, with many bags and crates labeled inaccurately or even incomprehensibly, would follow him through his last public service and into his retirement and still powerfully shapes his image nearly two centuries after his death.

The paradox of Adams's public triumph and private isolation in this first federal decade is not very puzzling. On the public side, his election as vice president was a testament to the fact that through fifteen years of national service, in both America and Europe, he had become the second most respected public figure—after George Washington—in nearly half the American states, when no other man commanded that respect in more than one or two states. His election as president, although quite close, was also no surprise. A loyal supporter of Washington's policies, Adams was the revered general's obvious successor, a role that Thomas Jefferson could never claim.

On the more private side, both in his personal life and as a political thinker, however, nearly everything about the Federalist era, including his own response to the political culture of the new nation, worked against him. His *Defence of the Constitutions* had already begun to make him unpopular with a few Virginians as the first presidential electors cast their ballots in the winter of 1789. In the spring he took his first official misstep, advocating an elevated, quasi-monarchical title

for the president within days of taking up the gavel in the new Senate, which damaged his political reputation far more than that of mere senators who favored similar titles. But Adams stubbornly adhered to his position; in the private exchange of letters with Congressman Roger Sherman in July, he repeated his initial objection to the Constitution, its granting to the Senate the power to consent to presidential appointments. Yet he approvingly pronounced that America's new government, even headed by an executive who was accorded fewer powers than he should have had, was in effect a constitutional monarchy.

But perhaps Adams's worst misstep as a federal official, and one of his more creative acts as a political thinker, was to prepare and submit his "Discourses on Davila" to the leading Federalist newspaper in the nation's capital. These essays were unsigned, but everyone soon knew their authorship. When he abruptly announced the termination of this series in April 1791, the damage had been done. Thomas Jefferson, deeply shocked by Adams's "Davila" essays, dragged his old friend into an impassioned public controversy between Democratic Republicans and Federalists that pitted Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* against Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*. Branded as an advocate of heretical notions of aristocracy and monarchy, Adams protested privately to Jefferson and then lapsed into silence for the remainder of his vice presidency. Six years of painful but determined discretion, at his podium in the Senate and in the public press, and eight years of loyal support for the policies of President Washington, which he thoroughly approved, carried him through to the presidency in 1797.

But again, the inner John Adams was not repentant; he never disowned a line of "Davila." In its general political convictions, Adams's "Discourses" so faithfully continued the main argument he had made in his *Defence of the Constitutions* that a few contemporaries, one modern scholar, and on occasion Adams himself regarded them as a fourth volume of that massive work. But in earlier numbers in this series, Adams opened up a new line of political argument. In several of his earlier writings, including the *Defence*, John Adams had referred repeatedly to the unchangeable forces of human nature that made republican governments based on checks and balances necessary, but he had never stopped to ask just how this universal behavior arose. In "Davila," with an assist from Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he finally did so.

Adams traced the roots of all political behavior to a universal passion for distinction that drove every man to see himself as superior to at least some other men, and often, to as many men as possible. To be fully enjoyed, of course, this distinction must be recognized. From this hunger arose both the central problem of human societies and governments, the competition of countless individuals for recognition, and its solution, the awarding of distinctions of various kinds and magnitudes—in wealth, in political power, and in civic honors—to various kinds of individuals of varying talents, whether informally by society or formally by government at every level. In formulating this position, John Adams

finally established his essential explanation for the existence of the Few—the most talented and ambitious of men—among the Many. In 1791 he left off all political speculation, but he was ready, when the time was ripe, to resume his inquiries, and several years into his retirement, he would begin to investigate just what qualities the Few presented to secure the support of the Many in a free republic.

The 1790s, however, was not the decade to press this investigation if John Adams hoped to remain in federal office and to advance to the executive chair, which he ardently wished to do. By 1791 he had come to recognize that the political culture of the young republic was thoroughly at odds with his republican vision. If he could not convince such presumably compatible correspondents as the venerable Connecticut Yankee, Roger Sherman (in 1789), and his own cousin, Samuel Adams (in 1790), that his views of executive authority, aristocracy, and the people were legitimately republican, he had no hope of persuading wider audiences. At the outset of a contentious decade that would see ferocious partisan struggles over public funding, banks, taxes, and armies, Americans had already settled on the theoretical basis of their new republic. The young nation was not interested in John Adams's rather different republic, one that appeared to call them back to an earlier era—-of powerful executives, of visible and haughty aristocrats, and of an orderly, deferential people—which they believed they had just escaped forever, through their own virtue and sacrifice.

X

A Retrospective Retirement

1801–1826

I know not how it is, but mankind have an aversion to the study of the science of government. Is it because the subject is dry? To me, no romance is more entertaining.

To Alexander Jardine, 1 June 1790

On 4 March 1801, at 4 a.m., eight hours before the inauguration of his successor, President John Adams boarded a stage bound for Baltimore, on his way home to Quincy and the longest retirement of any American president before the twentieth century. His mood on that day, following his defeat in the fall of 1800, may be readily surmised. His hasty departure before his term had quite ended, unique in the history of the presidency, suggests a bitter anger against his successor, his one-time colleague and friend turned political critic and rival, Thomas Jefferson. The testimony of Adams's correspondence amplifies this image. The total void of exchanges with Jefferson from 1801 to 1812, in conjunction with his occasional harsh judgments on the new president's performance of his duties in private letters to others, argues for a deep alienation. Yet one eloquent historian of his retirement claims to see "no deep resentments toward Jefferson" on that last day, and President Adams's last brief letters to his successor and an invitation to dinner before his departure suggest at least a lingering, correct cordiality between the two. During his long retirement, Adams never made Jefferson an explicit target of the wrath that he directed in public at selected political and diplomatic rivals.[1]

If Adams did not harbor bitter feelings toward his rival in March 1801, however, he did nurse keen resentments against certain other men, both living and deceased, whom he regarded as having unjustly tarnished his reputation and impeded his service to the nation. For several years he kept these feelings locked up inside, although his family daily saw his dark mood and sought to ease his suffering. Over the next quarter century, John Adams's struggle with his wounded pride passed through three overlapping stages. The first, lasting

until 1807, was a largely private accounting of his life and career expressed in a new literary work, his fragmentary autobiography, which he probably intended only for the eyes of his immediate family. The second, from 1807 to 1812, was an increasingly polemical defense of his public career, first in private correspondence with a former friend turned critic, and then at great length in public, directed at a few old and even departed antagonists.

The last chapter in the development of Adams's emotional and intellectual life began as early as 1805, when he restarted his long-lapsed correspondence with Dr. Benjamin Rush. But only with the deepening of that exchange, and then with the celebrated renewal of his correspondence with Thomas Jefferson in 1812, did Adams fully open himself up to a conscious and increasingly easy reconciliation with his own past, and with his country's past and present, in which he still vividly remembered his old battles in Europe and America, and still defended his distinctive political opinions with all his old ardor, but with a new sense of humor and of forgiveness, toward others and especially toward himself. In this final stage of his long retirement John Adams labored to come to terms with a new American republicanism that he could never quite accept. In nearly every year of his last quarter century, John Adams embarked on fresh attempts to understand and embrace the past and the present: of his own life, of his nation, and, above all, of the ongoing romance of man's eternal struggle to govern himself with intelligence, dignity, and humanity.

1. Adams Surveys His Life

In the first years of his retirement, a period of sharply decreased correspondence, the termination of public obligations, the cessation of all travel—for the next quarter century he never journeyed from Quincy any farther than Cambridge—and the sudden expansion of time for morbid brooding and licking his wounds, Adams turned to a new literary venture, an autobiography. This work, composed in brief spurts between 1802 and 1807, bears little comparison with the handful of more formally composed autobiographies of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European or American public figures, particularly the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, with which it has occasionally been contrasted. Adams's autobiography was everything that Franklin's was not: fragmentary rather than finished, rudely carpentered together rather than carefully composed, invariably candid rather than artfully discreet, and intended only for his own family—and for himself—rather than for a wider audience. Yet with all its defects, John Adams's narrative, in a set of three rough manuscripts read in all probably only by his son John Quincy and his grandson Charles Francis until the latter published the whole in the 1850s, gives a vivid portrait of Adams's youth, education, legal career, and service in Congress up to Independence, and a few tantalizing glimpses of his first diplomatic missions, to the abrupt termination of his narrative in the year 1780.[2]

The initial impetus for Adams's rough memoir is unknown. He began writing it in October 1802, but composed no more than a few pages, covering just his family heritage and his youth prior to entering college, before putting it aside for two years. In November 1804, probably in response to an appeal by his son John Quincy Adams, he set to work again. John Quincy, who evidently knew nothing of the earlier attempt, was concerned for his father's emotional state and believed that composing an autobiography might allow him to confront his anger over the abrupt end of his public career. As he resumed his labor, Adams objected that writing a memoir would only intensify his wounded feelings, which he freely admitted. But now he made good progress until June 1805, covering both his legal and political careers in some detail through the summer of 1776, before again putting his manuscript aside. When he returned to his task in December 1806, he made no attempt to continue this first and longest section, simply entitled "John Adams," to the completion of his service in Congress. Instead, he began a new section entitled "Travels, and Negotiations," devoted to his first diplomatic mission (1778–79). But sometime that winter he broke off his narrative at July 1778, some seven months before that mission was completed. He must have begun his third and shortest section, devoted to his peace commission (1779–83), later in the winter or in the spring of 1807, with the simple title, "Peace." But again, probably by early July, having proceeded no further than March 1780, he abruptly terminated this complex and tantalizing work in midsentence and never returned to it.[3]

For the student of John Adams's life, career, and literary legacy, the first long section of his "autobiography" (never called that by him) is nearly as disorganized as any long work he ever produced, his *Defence* and *Discourses on Davila* not excepted. The second and third sections, however, although incomplete, adhere to a strict chronological structure. The entire work is more original in content than either the *Defence* or *Davila*, with virtually all of its many long paraphrases and quotations drawn from his unpublished diary and his official correspondence, rather than from the works of others. It offers a direct access to his inner thoughts and feelings about his private life and his public service that is second only to his diary's most intimate passages. His narrative is of the first importance in illuminating the significance of several important episodes during his years in Congress and is nearly as valuable for understanding his first ventures as a diplomat.

Had Adams the stamina and steadiness of purpose to complete his autobiography to his retirement in 1801, or even to the conclusion of his diplomatic missions in 1788, we would know considerably more than the substantial amount we do know about his own view of his public career. The major aspect of his life to which this fragmentary work gives the least attention is, unfortunately for the purpose of this study, his political and constitutional thought. But even here, the autobiography speaks eloquently, if briefly. Most notable are his

passages on his controversy with General William Brattle over the independence of the judges and his constitutional duel with Governor Thomas Hutchinson, both in 1773 (see chap. 3), the circumstances of his decision to write his *Letters of Novanglus* in the winter of 1774–75 (chap. 4), and his arguments on the floor of Congress for the republican reform of America's colonial governments in 1775–76 (chap. 5).

As he progressed through his autobiography, Adams began to change the manner in which he constructed his narrative and presented historical materials. To recount some three decades of his youth, education, and legal career, he relied heavily on his memory, often supplemented with short pieces of factual detail drawn from his diary, to create a fairly smooth narrative. When he turned to his service in Congress, however, he began, at first occasionally, then more regularly, to incorporate both major declarations of that body and daily entries of its proceedings verbatim from its official journal. As he moved into 1775, this material became more frequent, and at times it quite disrupted his narrative drive. He would sometimes pause in the midst of recounting an important episode in Congress to remember that he had passed over something else of importance in the journal that he wished to include and would promptly bring it into his text. Because he was not consciously writing his autobiography for any reader outside his own home, he made no effort to reorganize these passages.[4]

By the time he reached 1776, however, Adams had become more comfortable with his new procedure, and he integrated his documentary material more smoothly into his narrative. After the long break of 1805–6, he followed his new documentary approach in the second and third sections of the autobiography quite faithfully until he terminated the work in 1807. The reproduction of substantial official documents and correspondence thoroughly dominates the text of these sections, devoted to his first years of diplomacy. Adams's decision to adopt this method of composition, although he initially executed it in a somewhat haphazard manner, was hardly accidental. In common with so many memoirs of public men down to the present day, his autobiography, even in its opening passages that evoked the charm of unsophisticated provincial life, was in effect an apologia for his career. This sense of a spirited defense, an elaborate legal brief for his thoughts, his deeds, and his character, grows as his narration proceeds. At some point in the early summer of 1807, probably because of his anger at the sudden discovery that his old friend Mercy Otis Warren had attacked his thoughts and deeds, and even his character, in her new history of the Revolution, Adams broke off his autobiography to mount a response. But he did not abandon his new manner of recounting and defending his career. He immediately put it to good use in several of his polemical letters to Mrs. Warren and employed it extensively in his long series of letters to the *Boston Patriot*.[5]

2. An Old Friendship Renewed: The Correspondence with Benjamin Rush

John Quincy Adams's notion that writing an autobiography might be therapeutic for his depressed father was sounder than he may have imagined. It helped lift John Adams's spirits to reengage with the world of politics, first in his private exchange with Mercy Warren, then in his public letters to the *Boston Patriot*. Before either polemical effort, however, Adams reached out in a more gracious fashion to an old friend. In his rich personal correspondence over seven decades, three exchanges stand out for their intimacy, creativity, and longevity: with his wife Abigail (over 1,000 letters, from 1762 to 1801), with Thomas Jefferson (over 300 letters, from 1777 to 1826), and with Dr. Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia (over 200 letters, from 1777 to 1813).

Jefferson and Rush, and their exchanges with Adams, share several remarkable features. Although both were public men, in quite different ways, their correspondences with Adams, while often heavily political in theme, were largely personal rather than official. Both correspondences began modestly but gradually expanded in frequency and substance; each was interrupted for a long period, at least in part due to political differences; and Adams restarted both correspondences, that with Rush on his own initiative, that with Jefferson at Rush's urging. Finally, Adams's correspondence with Dr. Rush, beginning in the same year as that with Jefferson, could well have lasted as long had Rush not died unexpectedly at the age of sixty-eight.[6]

John Adams's early correspondence with Rush, from 1777 to 1785, was neither extensive nor of major importance to either man. For most of this period Adams was in Europe, where both the news and political opinions sent by two closer friends, James Warren in Massachusetts and James Lovell in Congress, were of far greater value to him. The letters Adams and Rush exchanged in 1789 and 1790, however, when the vice president was in New York and the doctor at home in Philadelphia, were more intimate, and more revealing of their personal convictions, in part because each man began to express his objections to the other's politics (chap. 9, sect. 4). The idealistic Dr. Rush, who would soon support the Democratic Republicans, was in the vanguard of those who dissented from Adams's new republican vision. From 1791 through 1804, the two exchanged no letters, and it is tempting to equate this long break with one of roughly equal duration (1797–1811) in Adams's correspondence with Thomas Jefferson. But the cessations were not alike. Adams moved with the government to Philadelphia in 1790, where he and Abigail were close friends of Benjamin and Julia Rush for several years. Moreover, neither Rush nor Adams was ever bitter about their political differences, as both Jefferson and Adams undeniably were for many years following the election of 1800.[7]

Nevertheless, it must have taken some courage for Adams, who was still largely isolated from the world outside Quincy and had no correspondence with Democratic Republicans anywhere, to address his old friend in February 1805, after a break of nearly fifteen years. Adams's autobiography in progress may have prompted this initiative. For several months in the fall and winter of 1804–5 his memory was drawn back, on every day that he wrote his text, to the Congress in Philadelphia from 1774 to 1776. The process of creating his narrative returned him to that critical period when he first knew Rush and reminded him how few men appreciated the political struggles in those years. In a passage that he may have penned at or shortly before the time he composed his first retirement letter to the doctor, Adams recalled that his own effort to secure Congress's resolution of May 1776, which appealed to the colonies to create new governments free of influence by the British Crown, "is now forgotten by all but Dr. Rush and a very few like him who survive."[8]

John Adams opened his letter of 6 February 1805 with an invitation to an emotionally substantial correspondence: "It seemeth to me that you and I ought not to die without saying goodbye or bidding each other adieu. Pray how do you do?" His appeal was richly rewarded. Rush responded immediately, and over the next eight years the two men exchanged more than 150 letters. They still had their political differences, and they disagreed even more strongly over the study of Latin and Greek, which Adams revered, and the good doctor thought nearly worthless. But Rush, who often changed his political opinions—although not his core convictions—had, since Adams last saw him in the late 1790s, changed them again. A Pennsylvania radical in the winter and spring of 1776, when he suggested the title for Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and supported John Adams's campaign for independence, next an opponent of the radical Constitutionalist Party in Pennsylvania politics during the Revolutionary War, and then a Democratic Republican through the 1790s, Rush had become disillusioned with politics by 1805. Aside from their often divergent—but nearly as often parallel—politics and their dissimilar professions, the two men were remarkably alike. Each was a learned son of the Enlightenment, passionate and opinionated on a wide variety of subjects. They were also the two most indiscreet, outspoken major figures of America's founding generation. The result was a remarkable chemistry, noted in 1812 by Julia Rush, who characterized her husband and John Adams, in their eager anticipation of each letter from the other, as corresponding "like two young girls about their sweethearts."[9]

The last eight years of his correspondence with Dr. Rush, the most important for both men from 1805 until Rush's death in April 1813, restored John Adams's vital connection with the American republic that he had done so much to establish. It also gave him a fresh venue to develop further a subject he had addressed at length in the 1780s and the 1790s, the character of republican aristocracy. He pursued this question in several writings from 1808 through 1815, and

the substance of his thought on aristocracy in his retirement years merits a separate discussion (sect. 6, below). But as he wrote more frequently and fully to Dr. Rush, he was surprised to find that his old comrade in arms was even more distressed about the current state of American politics and more skeptical of the merit of the nation's political convictions than he was. This discovery encouraged Adams to engage anew with the legacy of the American Revolution and recover some considerable measure of faith in that event's ideals and achievements. When in 1808 Rush remarked: "O! had I but one ten thousand of those precious days which did no work for my family between the years 1774 and 1780, they should not again be employed in exposing the acts of British tyrants and American demagogues. I feel pain when I am reminded of my exertions in the cause of what we called liberty, and sometimes wish I could erase my name from the Declaration of Independence," Adams sternly berated him: "Now sir, for your Groans, You and I in the Revolution acted from Principle; we did our Duty, as we then believed, according to our best Information, Judgment, and Consciences. Shall we now repent of this? God forbid! No! If a banishment to Cayenne, or to Bottany Bay or even the Guillotine were to be the necessary Consequences of it to us, we ought not to repent. Repent? This is impossible: how can a Man repent of his virtues?"[10]

Adams's exhortation, and many others in letters to come, slowly brought Rush back to an appreciation of the Revolutionary generation and his role in it. And at last it encouraged him to urge Adams to renew another old friendship. On 1 January 1812, John Adams sat down to reopen his long severed correspondence with Thomas Jefferson. In the summer of 1813, following Rush's unexpected passing, Adams redoubled his correspondence with Jefferson, as if he now expected the Sage of Monticello to perform the duties of two remarkable correspondents.

3. Political Battles Resume

In 1805, John and Abigail's old friend Mercy Otis Warren published *A History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution: Interspersed with Biographical, Political, and Moral Observations*. John Adams evidently did not read this work until 1807, but when he finally delved into its three volumes, he was both surprised and deeply offended. Although Warren had not cast him as a central figure in the bulk of her narrative, several of her bare summaries of his public acts, and more particularly the judgments she passed on his political beliefs and his motivations as a public servant, were highly critical of a man whom, he had assumed, she still regarded as a friend. Adams immediately sent off a letter of protest and quickly followed up with another. Mercy initially responded in some puzzlement and professed to see no reason for his anger. But Adams kept writing; between 11 July and 19 August 1807 he sent off ten substantial letters, extending to over one hundred pages. Warren replied six times in some

fifty pages and became so upset that she asked their mutual friend Elbridge Gerry, then governor of Massachusetts, to arbitrate their controversy. Gerry did his best to calm Mrs. Warren and briefly expressed his agreement with one of her most damning accusations, that Adams had become an apostate from America's republican orthodoxy. But he apparently did not speak to John Adams about the matter for some time, until, with Abigail's assistance, he was finally able to help reconcile the two antagonists.[11]

The Adams-Warren controversy of 1807 did not become a public event during John Adams's lifetime. It had no impact on anyone outside the two families except for Elbridge Gerry, and the contentious correspondence remained private until 1878, when Charles Francis Adams published it in full, along with a few of Gerry's letters to Warren and a generous reprinting of "specimen pages" from her *History* to which John Adams had referred. But this heated exchange had an immediate and lasting effect on John Adams. It was the likely cause of his sudden termination of his autobiography. Of far greater importance, it brought him out of his shell and forced him, for the first time in over a decade, to defend his political career. Thus began the second, polemical phase in Adams's long retirement. He would build on this initial defense as he mounted his massive counterattack against Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, and other old critics and antagonists in his long series of letters submitted to the *Boston Patriot* (1809–12). Finally, Mercy Warren's sharp criticism of John Adams's political thought impelled him to comment on his distinctive brand of republicanism for the first time since he had terminated his "Davila" essays in 1791.

The substance of John Adams's defense of his political thought in 1807 began in his first letter to Mercy Warren, of 11 July, and effectively concluded in his long second letter, of 20 July. She responded quite effectively to both letters in her second letter, of 28 July. In his subsequent letters, Adams briefly complained of her *History*'s few innocuous remarks on his early career, in which he detected a lack of proper respect for what he had achieved, before beginning an exhaustive defense of his diplomatic record in Holland and France, a subject that would later dominate his letters to the *Boston Patriot*. In his last three letters, he turned in earnest to the closing decade of his public life. After tracing the initial disapproval of his political views, by both James and Mercy Warren, to the year 1786, when they had supported Massachusetts's distressed farmers during Shays's Rebellion, he placed the beginning of their active support for Thomas Jefferson and the Democratic Republicans to the early 1790s, while Jefferson was still secretary of state. In his final letter, Adams briefly introduced a theme that would become a crucial part of his correspondence to the *Boston Patriot* by tying Mercy Warren's views to Alexander Hamilton's caustic attack on him during the election of 1800. With varying effectiveness, shaped in part by her uneven knowledge of the complexities of Adams's diplomatic career, Mrs. Warren's four letters of August attempted to answer this barrage of complaints.[12]

In his opening letter, Adams introduced his brief against Mrs. Warren by drawing her attention to three accusations that appeared on a single page toward the end of the third and final volume of her *History*. To the first, that "his passions and prejudices were sometimes too strong for his sagacity and judgment," he responded: "I will not, I cannot say that this is not true." But he denied that he had ever "performed one public act from passion or prejudice, or from any other motive than the public good." This candid defense was rather close to Benjamin Franklin's celebrated remark of 1783 that Adams was always a wise and honest public servant, but was "sometimes, and in some things, absolutely out of his senses." Adams dismissed Warren's second charge as an ill-informed appraisal of his performance as minister to Great Britain in the late 1780s. But he rightly regarded her third accusation to be "the most exceptionable passage yet found on this page," when she declared that he had become "so enamoured with the British Constitution and the government, manners, and laws of the nation, that a partiality for monarchy appeared, which was inconsistent with his former professions of republicanism."[13]

Of all of the judgments that Mercy Warren leveled against John Adams in 1805, this was the most telling, because it most perfectly expressed the prevailing Democratic-Republican view of Adams's political thought since at least 1791, when Jefferson first implied that the author of the "Davila" essays was guilty of "political heresy." To this most serious accusation, Adams promptly responded that his admiration for the British constitution, acquired over more than two decades of careful study in British and continental legal and political treatises before his first departure for Europe, owed nothing to his residence in England, which did not increase his affection for any aspect of British culture. He then emphatically denied that he favored a hereditary monarchy in America and added that the speculation that "circumstances in some future day may render it necessary to adopt an hereditary monarchy in the United States," which Warren had placed in one of her occasional asterisked notes, without an explicit attribution to any particular person, "is going the utmost length to which I have ever gone in any of my writings and conversation, though I could name to you men in high rank, power, and popularity with the present predominant party, who have gone much further, and asserted that the Constitution of the United States was defective in not having an hereditary Executive and Senate." Adams finished this first letter by insisting that his republicanism was as pure as that of a host of other American patriots, including several Democratic Republicans, a theme that he briefly continued in his second letter. Thereafter, he dropped the subject and turned to Warren's more prosaic criticisms of his public service.[14]

His impassioned correspondence of 1807 with Mercy Warren does not show John Adams at his best. As his letters increased in both length and number, his sensitivity to her criticisms grew more acute, his complaints grew more petty, and he became, at times, both arrogant and condescending, to which Mercy

responded with her own distinctive hauteur. The exchange did reveal something of the origins of their mutual discord. Adams expressed his conviction that both the Warrens had begun moving away from a commitment to a balanced political order when they sympathized with Shays's Rebellion in the fall of 1786. Mercy dated the couple's dismay at Adams's novel political views to conversations they had with him during a visit to his home shortly after his return from England in the summer of 1788.[15]

Left unspoken, however, was another source of conflict, Vice President Adams's cool reply to Mercy Warren's letter of May 1789, in which she sought some unspecified official positions in the new federal government for both her husband and her sons. Adams's irritated response was probably in part an expression of his frustration with several Massachusetts friends who were seeking political favors that he had no power to grant. But in his letter to Mercy, he countered her complaint that her husband was misunderstood and maligned at home by Governor Hancock's dominant political machine by stating his belief that his old friend had not always acted admirably. This was certainly a veiled reference to the Warrens' outspoken sympathy for Shays's Rebellion and was probably the first time he voiced this criticism to either Mercy or James. But Adams's problems with the Warrens predated his disapproval of their behavior in 1786. He was keenly disappointed at James's withdrawal from public service in Massachusetts in the early 1780s and was dismayed at the unethical and immoral behavior of the Warrens' sons James and Winslow in America and Europe beginning in the late 1770s.[16]

The poisonous exchange between John Adams and Mercy Warren in May 1789 marked a watershed in an old friendship. Mercy continued her correspondence with Abigail Adams, but she wrote only two brief, irritated notes to John, in 1790 and 1791, and one more in 1803. John responded more positively, but not warmly. Only in the last year of Mercy Warren's life (1813–14) did he try to restore their old epistolary friendship. As for John Adams and James Warren, who had been the most regular and intimate correspondents during the Revolution and continued to write long, friendly letters when John was in Europe, the two men never exchanged a single line after Adams returned to America.[17]

Following on the breakdown of an old friendship, John Adams's protestations of republican virtue in his opening letters of 1807 to Mercy Otis Warren are doubly poignant. Unless he could persuade Mrs. Warren of his innocence of the charge of monarchism so convincingly that she would publicly retract her indictment—which she never considered doing—no argument that he chose to make could counter the damage that he believed she had inflicted on his public reputation as long as their correspondence remained private. And it would remain private for over seventy years. More affecting to one who has charted the development of Adams's political thought over some fifty years prior to this correspondence, however, is an essential truth at the heart of his defense.

It would be difficult to establish the accuracy of Adams's assertion that many prominent Americans in public life, including several Democratic Republicans, shared some part of his positive view of monarchy, particularly when he does not name them. And here he may simply have misunderstood several of his countrymen. As for Adams himself, however, he understood, as Mercy Otis Warren and several modern historians and political scientists who came after her have not, that both his admiration for the British constitution and his insistence on the value of what he called "republican monarchy" had their roots not in his years of diplomatic service in the 1780s in either Britain or continental Europe but in his extensive reading in British and European political literature in the 1760s and 1770s. His European experience did not implant in his mind two political emotions—an admiration for executive power and a fear of aristocracy—that lay at the heart of his political thought. But his long years of foreign service did encourage their growth, not under the nourishing corruption of luxurious court life, which Adams despised just as deeply as did Mrs. Warren, but in response to what he saw as the increasingly haughty, aristocratic political culture of his own country, especially as vested in his masters in Congress. In this sense, Mercy Warren, who thought she knew John Adams intimately, never understood him.

John Adams's long exchange of anguished letters with Mercy Warren, ending in unresolved acrimony, brought him no real satisfaction, either in 1807 or later, although it may have afforded him some cathartic relief. But it did bring him into closer contact with the outside world, a process already begun in his correspondence with Benjamin Rush since 1805, and over the next several years he began to respond to major political events occurring around him. He used those occasions both to restate his political views and to settle old political scores.

If one impetus for his renewed political engagement was Mercy Warren's *History*, another was closer to home. His son John Quincy had returned to America from his diplomatic post in Prussia in 1801; in 1803 he was elected to the U.S. Senate by the Massachusetts legislature. Among his first acts as a senator was to support legislation implementing the Louisiana Purchase (1803–4); one of his last was to vote for President Jefferson's Embargo (December 1807). His father approved both decisions, but Massachusetts's Federalists were dismayed, and the latter vote so angered the state legislature that in May 1808, acting six months before the usual election date, it chose to replace him for the next term. In June, young Adams promptly resigned his seat, nine months before his term expired, and returned to private life in Boston. But in 1809, President James Madison appointed him minister plenipotentiary to Russia, over the opposition of Federalist senators from his own state. The effect of the vicissitudes of John Quincy's public career upon his father, an ardent admirer of his son's political courage and independence, was to make the public world again vital and important, and the elder statesman soon took up his pen.[18]

Just as John Quincy Adams was ending his senatorial career, one of his colleagues, James Hillhouse of Connecticut, published a pamphlet entitled *Propositions for Amending the Constitution of the United States, submitted by Mr. Hillhouse to the Senate, on the twelfth day of April, 1808, with his Explanatory Remarks*. Unlike either Mercy Warren's *History*, which had prompted John Adams's angry letters of 1807, or various earlier criticisms of his career and character in publications and public correspondence by Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, and a few others, to which he would soon take such impassioned—and extended—exception in his letters to the *Boston Patriot*, this treatise made no reference to Adams or to his political writings, and therefore did not call for any response. But quite aside from any partisan feelings, to which Adams was as subject in 1808 as at any time in his career, Hillhouse raised two issues that lay near to his heart. The first, developed in the senator's "explanatory remarks," was a brief discussion of the nature of aristocracy, particularly in its American setting. The second was the proper limitation of executive power under the Constitution. Adams promptly drafted a critique of Senator Hillhouse's pamphlet, which he attempted to publish, but without success. Some two decades after his death, his grandson Charles Francis Adams found the manuscript review of Hillhouse's tract in his grandfather's papers and included it in his edition of Adams's *Works*.[19]

Adams opened his review by disclaiming any partisan motives, which he saw as driving most of the political literature of the day, and he pledged to treat Hillhouse's amendments as sincere proposals for the public good. He certainly believed his own disclaimer, but according to his own later testimony, the publisher to whom he submitted his essay apparently did not, and with good reason. James Hillhouse was a prominent member of the High Federalist Party, which Adams saw behind both his own defeat in the presidential election of 1800 and the Massachusetts legislature's recent termination of his son's senatorial career, and he could not restrain himself from charging that the senator, "becoming yearly of less and less influence, and, at present, finding himself in a minority, consisting at most of three or four in the senate," had "grown impatient, and determined . . . to make himself a name, and increase his importance." Adams's essay on Hillhouse's amendments was as baldly political as any piece he ever wrote; its true subject was neither aristocracy nor executive power, but America's partisan divisions.[20]

Yet Adams's polemic did seriously consider Hillhouse's views on aristocracy and, less explicitly, on executive power, which were diametrically opposed to the convictions that Adams had espoused for nearly three decades. Moreover, despite several statements of fact and a few turns of phrase that link the essay both to Adams's periodic claims of political injury in his ongoing correspondence with Dr. Benjamin Rush and to his angry protests against yet more personal

injuries that he directed at Mercy Otis Warren the previous summer—as well as to a torrent of similar complaints in his *Boston Patriot* letters, beginning the following spring—the review reveals a John Adams who was developing a broader perspective on partisan conflict in America and working toward an accommodation with the daily operations of the republic whose fate he had earlier painted, in some of his private correspondence, in more apocalyptic colors. Adams's review of Hillhouse forms a kind of bridge—a slender and little-known bridge—between his earlier *Defence of the Constitutions* (1787–88) and "Discourses on Davila" (1790–91) and his later correspondence with Thomas Jefferson (particularly in 1813) and his extended epistolary reply in 1814–15 to the criticism of his *Defence* in John Taylor's *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States*.[21]

Adams began his critique of Hillhouse's pamphlet by accepting the senator's definitions of monarchy and democracy, of federalists and republicans, but he objected to his characterization of aristocracy on several grounds. First, Hillhouse claimed that in forming their governments, American had followed the tripartite model—embracing monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy—of England. In reply, Adams repeated his conviction, first voiced in his *Defence of the Constitutions*, that Americans had simply adopted the tripartite model of their own colonial governments, in which neither the monarchical nor the aristocratic elements were hereditary. Second, Adams flatly rejected Hillhouse's assertion that "to form an aristocracy, hereditary succession is indispensable." To prove that America had a powerful aristocracy without titles, he gave as examples two men, New York's Robert R. Livingston (his old nemesis during his diplomatic endeavors in Holland and Paris) and Virginia's John Randolph of Roanoke, who were, he claimed, more powerful in America than the Duke of Norfolk and the Duke of Bedford in England. Third, he answered Hillhouse's claim that "the United States do not possess the materials for forming an aristocracy" by declaring that America did possess "one material which actually constitutes an aristocracy that governs the nation. That material is wealth." Finally, to Hillhouse's claim that "we have not the means of making an aristocratical branch of government," Adams replied that America already had such a branch, the United States Senate.[22]

Adams then turned to Senator Hillhouse's proposed amendments, which would have created a radically restructured federal government that he could only regard with horror. The House of Representatives would be popularly elected annually (this Adams would later approve). Senators, chosen as before by state legislatures, would serve for three years, in the same staggered rotation established in 1787. The president would be chosen—not elected—annually by lot. Senators whose term of service would first expire would draw balls from a closed box in the presence of both houses of Congress; the one colored ball

would designate the chief executive for the coming year. This president would submit all nominations for executive officials and ambassadors for approval by both the House and Senate.[23]

Had John Adams been presented with such a plan in the 1780s, he would—after expressing his most profound indignation—certainly have argued that the system would fail because it lacked a strong executive who could mediate between the Senate and the House, that is, between the forces of aristocracy and democracy. He still believed this, but by 1808 Adams had for some two decades observed how America's state and federal governments actually worked and had begun to gain some understanding of the new political mechanisms that connected his countrymen with their governments. Adams's review of Hillhouse, therefore, did not read like a précis of either his *Defence of the Constitutions* or his "Discourses on Davila." Instead, he focused his argument on something he had long despised but had grudgingly come to accept: political parties.

John Adams's new accommodation with political parties, of course, was nothing like the understanding and appreciation of America's party system that would develop in the Jacksonian era. Although he was not prepared to accord to parties the virtues that he believed aristocracy possessed, along with its many faults, he did regard these creations as just as inevitable as aristocracy. And in 1808, Adams understood that Americans had not simply divided into aristocratic Federalists versus Democratic Republicans. Their political behavior since the ratification of the federal Constitution had made it clear that every national political party in America must inevitably possess both aristocratic and democratic elements, that each party would contest with equal energy for seats in both the House and Senate (and in every state House and Senate), and that each would seek executive power. In assessing Hillhouse's amendments, the central question was whether they would increase or decrease partisan division, with its danger of gridlock or stalemate between the branches of government. On every count, Adams judged that Hillhouse's system, by making elections more frequent, and particularly by opening up the approval of the executive's appointments to the whole Congress, would make American government profoundly unethical, immoral, contentious, and chaotic, and eventually, totally anarchic.[24]

John Adams's first clear statement of a new, more sympathetic understanding of American politics remained unpublished, and therefore hidden from the public. In 1809 he would return to his polemical campaign to restore his reputation, and for three more years Americans would see the choleric, combative John Adams in print almost every week. But the process of reconciliation to what the American republic had become had begun, and from 1812 until his death, it would steadily develop into the dominant mood in Adams's relationship to his countrymen.

John Adams's voluminous letters to the *Boston Patriot* of 1809–12 have been astutely characterized as a second autobiography, and a far more defensive perfor-

mance than his first. But his initial submissions to that journal in the spring of 1809 were of two different kinds, in response to quite different events. His second series of letters, in the order in which he dated them (but his first in original composition), was indeed a self-defense, a spirited response to the recent republication of Alexander Hamilton's 1800 election pamphlet attacking President John Adams. His first publication, however, was neither self-defensive nor autobiographical; its object was the defense of a principle espoused by another Adams.[25]

In the winter of 1808–9, after years of private, almost secret writings in the fragmentary sections of his autobiography and in his manuscript review of Senator Hillhouse's amendments, John Adams finally sat down to address a current foreign policy issue. In January 1809, when he began an essay that became "The Inadmissible Principles of the King of England's Proclamation of October 16, 1807, Considered," he may have merely intended to develop for himself a theme that he had briefly examined in a recent letter to a Massachusetts congressman, but by April he was ready to commit his prose, for the first time in eight years, to public scrutiny. Never a party man, Adams finally broke irrevocably with the policies of Massachusetts's Federalists, who had so abruptly derailed his son's public career. As the vehicle of his new public voice, he chose a Jeffersonian paper, the *Boston Patriot*.[26]

Adams's subject was Great Britain's haughty insistence on the British navy's right to impress British-born sailors on the high seas, the proximate cause of Jefferson's Embargo of December 1807, and thereby the cause of his son's sudden departure from public life. Although he thought John Quincy's public career was over, John believed the principle on which his son had stood in voting for the Embargo was worth defending. That principle was the right of any British-born sailor who had lawfully joined the crew of any American vessel to be immune from impressment by force, on the high seas, into the Royal Navy. Adams categorically rejected the British monarch's claim that in time of war a sailor's native country could command his return to naval service from abroad. He even doubted Britain's right to conscript its own subjects at home. The first of the essay's four letters appeared most fittingly on 19 April, the anniversary of the battles of Lexington and Concord, a date that Adams had previously affixed, in 1781, to his formal request that the Netherlands recognize the independence of the United States. That same month, in the same paper, John Quincy began his own set of essays on American foreign policy. By June, shortly before President Madison's nomination of John Quincy Adams as America's first recognized envoy to Russia was finally approved by the Senate, both father and son had concluded their treatments of America's naval rights on the high seas, using quite different styles of argument but reaching the same conclusions. By August, John Quincy had departed for Europe.[27]

Well before this, however, John Adams had completed his second, longer series of letters to the *Boston Patriot*, his response to Alexander Hamilton's old

election pamphlet, whose recent republication in an edition of Hamilton's works led to an observation on Adams's estrangement from the Federalists in a Baltimore paper, which the *Patriot* soon ran in its pages. Adams had actually composed much of the text of these letters as early as 1801, the first year of his retirement, but he only began putting them in final form in April 1809. As quickly as he could polish his prose, he submitted the letters to the *Patriot*, and by June he had seen all eighteen into print.[28]

The theme of this series was Adams's struggle, against the determined resistance of Federalist leaders, both in Congress and in his own cabinet, to send a second peace mission to France in 1799, which resulted in a permanent treaty in 1800. The first letter introduced this controversy as the cause of his permanent estrangement from Federalist leaders, an estrangement in which he took undisguised pride in 1809. In several ensuing letters Adams presented a somewhat impersonal view of the beginnings of the affair, but from letter ix to the end he referred increasingly to Alexander Hamilton's 1800 pamphlet, *A Letter Concerning the Public Conduct and Behavior of John Adams*, a withering condemnation of the president's diplomacy that was designed to effect his defeat in the election of that year. Adams's argument in the *Patriot* was, for him, quite cool and restrained, and he adhered closely to the facts as he knew them. Only once, in letter xvii, did he venture two broader opinions about the character of America's republic. First, he repeated one of his favorite republican convictions—that corruption usually began in the legislative branch when it improperly aspired to executive capacity. Second, he argued that presidential electors should be chosen directly by the people, and not by state legislatures, as they were in Massachusetts and several other states. This would make the people more attentive to selecting executives who would be independent of "factious combinations of senators, representatives, heads of departments, or military officers." These were, not incidentally, the very forces that had attempted to bully President John Adams.[29]

Adams's belated public defense of his administration, and perhaps the memory of Mercy Warren's stinging remarks on his career in her *History*, soon whetted his appetite to address criticisms of earlier chapters in his public service, centering particularly on his peace diplomacy in the early 1780s. In this defense, he increasingly employed the technique he had developed in his autobiography, the extensive presentation of both official documents and personal letters in his possession, with relatively brief commentary. Adams continued this effort for nearly three years, until February 1812, through some 130 letters. Many of these were collected and published as *Correspondence of the Late President Adams. Originally published in the Boston Patriot.*[30] Little of this extensive text deals with the complexity of his political thought or his distinctive constitutional ideas, but his letters to the *Boston Patriot* had three effects that cannot be ignored. First, his renewed engagement in public issues encouraged the broad-

ening of his ongoing correspondence with his old friend, Benjamin Rush. Second, it prepared him for an even more extensive late correspondence with Thomas Jefferson. Finally, John Adams's polemical return to the public arena encouraged him to make a vigorous reply to John Taylor's *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States* (1814), a work that forthrightly attacked Adams's concept of aristocracy in his *Defence of the American Constitutions*.

4. One Last Friendship: The Correspondence with Thomas Jefferson

Dr. Benjamin Rush's fervent appeals to Thomas Jefferson and John Adams in 1811 to renew their old correspondence and their old friendship, which were rewarded when Adams wrote to Jefferson on New Year's Day in 1812, are familiar to many Americans. But Rush's campaign to bring the two together began earlier, in a most remarkable fashion. Writing to Adams in October 1809, Rush recounted a dream in which he read, in a history of the United States, the following text:

> 1809 Among the most extraordinary events of this year was the renewal of the friendship and intercourse between Mr. John Adams and Mr. Jefferson. . . . [After a long friendship] a difference of opinion upon the objects and issue of the French Revolution separated them. . . . In the month of November 1809, Mr. Adams addressed a short letter to his friend Mr. Jefferson in which he congratulated him upon his escape to the shades of retirement and domestic happiness. . . . Mr. Jefferson replied to this letter and reciprocated expressions of regard and esteem. These letters were followed by a correspondence of several years, in which they mutually reviewed the scenes of business in which they had been engaged, and candidly acknowledged to each other all the errors of opinion and conduct into which they had fallen. . . . These gentlemen sunk into the grave nearly at the same time, full of years and rich in the gratitude and praises of their country (for they outlived the heterogeneous parties that were opposed to them), and to their numerous merits and honors posterity has added that they were rival friends.

Adams promptly replied: "A Dream again! I wish you would dream all day and all Night, for one of your dreams puts me in spirits for a Month. I have no other objection to your Dream, but that it is not History. It may be Prophecy."[31]

John Adams's two most celebrated correspondences—and celebrated is the precise word accorded to them by American historians and the broader public for over half a century—are those with his wife, Abigail, and with Thomas Jefferson. The latter exchange has every imaginable attraction: duration (1777–1826); a warmth of friendship and respect, dramatically punctuated by a sudden chill (1791–96), and then a long, painful interruption (1797–1811); an unexpected

reconciliation through the good offices of a devoted mutual friend (1812); a dramatic conclusion in the simultaneous deaths of both men on the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence; and, in its last phase (1812–26), an astonishing range of learned and passionate opinion on politics, religion, education, and literature. For the student of Adams's political thought, this epic exchange has a more particular attraction, a relatively brief (June–December 1813) but intense discussion of the nature and role of aristocracy in government.[32]

The larger pattern of Adams's correspondence with Jefferson resembles that with Dr. Rush, but Adams's correspondences with the two men during his retirement were as different as the personalities behind them. The Adams-Rush correspondence was both warmer and more equal; the letters headed south and north with a steady frequency nearly every month, and neither man showed any reserve in expressing his views on any subject. With Jefferson, however, Adams behaved differently as a correspondent, and Jefferson was a very different correspondent from Dr. Rush. Both Adams and Jefferson were warier and more circumspect as they coped, at first in restrained silence, with the memories of their long political estrangement. On certain topics, notably the proper character of republican government and the value of religion, they would always differ.[33]

What is most striking in this late correspondence, however, is the sheer volume of Adams's letters, which in most years outnumbered Jefferson's two-to-one, and in 1813, five-to-one. External circumstances explain some of the disparity; Adams had fewer correspondents than Jefferson, which allowed him more time to write more letters to Monticello, and to read more books, about which he often wrote at length in those letters. But Adams evidently felt a greater emotional need to write to Jefferson than Jefferson did to reply. After Benjamin Rush's death in April 1813, Adams had few correspondents outside Massachusetts, and not a large number there. More important, he had few other surviving friends from his long public service, and only one with whom he could summon up memories of both Paris and Philadelphia. And so the correspondence flourished, and from 1813 until his death Adams's letters to Jefferson became the main vehicle for his ideas on a hundred subjects, but on republican government most of all.[34]

It is fitting that the character of republican government soon took a prominent position in the late correspondence of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson; their contrasting political philosophies had been at the core of their first estrangement, in 1791. A full exploration of their differences, however, even in a long final correspondence, was hardly foreordained—if in fact they ever really achieved it. From the fall of 1787, in their first comments on the new federal Constitution, they had expressed sharply opposing views of the central challenge of national government in America. But due largely to Jefferson's dislike of direct political controversy, and Adams's frequent accommodation of his friend's sensitivity, the two men often refrained from expressing in full the dis-

agreements that each had with the other. Two crucial passages in their exchange in 1791, discussed earlier (chap. 9, sect. 4, at n. 70) in the context of the controversy sparked by Jefferson's endorsement of Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*, bear repeating here for the larger insight they afford for understanding their contrasting political personalities. On that occasion Jefferson could declare, in all sincerity: "That you and I differ in our ideas of the best form of government is well known to us both: but we have differed as friends should do, respecting the purity of each other's motives, and confining our differences to private conversation." And Adams could reply with equal sincerity, but with greater candor: "You observe 'That You and I differ in our Ideas of the best form of government is well known to us both.' But, my dear Sir, you will give me leave to say, that I do not know this. I do not know what your Idea is of the best form of Government. You and I have never had a serious conversation together that I can recollect concerning the nature of Government. The very transient hints that have ever passed between Us have been jocular and superficial, without ever coming to any explanation."[35]

Adams must have had his old friend's political diffidence in mind when he opened their correspondence in January 1812. Both that letter and several to follow—and all of Jefferson's early replies—were suffused with politeness and caution. Each man recognized and directly complimented the other's particular interests, and each introduced published works on history, literature, and religion for discussion. They did take up events of the day, particularly America's ongoing quarrel with Britain over maritime rights, which led to America's declaration of war in June 1812, but for over a year Adams treated potentially sensitive political topics fairly gingerly, and Jefferson avoided them entirely. Soon after the death of their mutual friend, Dr. Rush, in April 1813, however, the character of their letters, particularly of Adams's letters, changed. In just under seven months (27 May to 25 December 1813), during which Jefferson wrote six letters to Adams, Adams wrote twenty-eight to Jefferson. In late June, after receiving three letters from Adams in a single week, Jefferson betrayed his bemusement at this flood of words. In a protest against "the forest of opinions, discussions, and contentions which have occurred in our day"—of which Adams's own grove was a major part—he opened his next letter with an image by the Greek pastoral poet Theocritus, who imagined a woodcutter coming into a vast forest on the slopes of Mount Ida, looking out over many thousand trees, and crying out in despair, "What should I cut first?"[36]

But it was Jefferson, in this 27 June letter, who first raised the subject that would dominate several of Adams's replies for the rest of the year: the nature, purpose, and value of political aristocracy. Jefferson said most of what he would have to say on the subject of aristocracy in this letter and a longer one in October. But Adams, who had been developing his very different ideas on this theme at several intervals since his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*

(1787–88)—notably in his "Discourses on Davila" (1790–91), in a half dozen letters to Dr. Rush from 1807 to 1810, and in his review of Senator Hillhouse's amendments (1808)—explored the issue in more than a dozen letters to Jefferson before the year's end. And for nearly another year, beginning in April 1814, he expanded on the theme in a long series of letters to John Taylor of Caroline, whose recent *Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States* had strongly criticized Adams's concept of aristocracy in the *Defence*. Adams's arresting images of aristocracy in his letters to Jefferson of 1813 relate so closely to passages in several of his other writings on this subject, from 1807 to 1815, that it will be best to treat them together in detail below (sect. 6).

5. One Last Battle: The Reply to John Taylor of Caroline

In September 1813, Adams wrote to Jefferson that he had just received from the post office "a Packett, without Post Mark, without Letter, without name date or place," which contained "a printed Copy of Eighty or Ninety Pages in large full Octavo." He correctly guessed the author to be John Taylor of Caroline County, Virginia. Taylor's gift, a substantial section of a work that would soon appear as his *Inquiry*, contained an extended attack on Adams's view of aristocracy first advanced in his *Defence*.[37]

John Taylor's *Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of Government* was his magnum opus, a massive tome of some 650 pages that summed up the thoughts of this ardent Jeffersonian Democratic Republican on America's economy, government, and society dating back over twenty years, to when he served briefly in the U.S. Senate during Adams's vice presidency and wrote his first pamphlet against banks and the Hamiltonian fiscal system. Adams's *Defence* was the first and largest target of the *Inquiry*, but it was only one offense in the vast field of errors, by many offenders, that Taylor saw around him.[38]

Adams's response was a more modest production. Beginning in mid-April 1814 and extending over nearly a year, he wrote thirty-two letters to Taylor in defense of his earlier work; the majority dealt with aristocracy. He at first composed and sent his letters every few days; subsequently he issued them in several clusters separated by long breaks. He evidently made no attempt to publish them, and they remained in manuscript until Charles Francis Adams included them in his grandfather's *Works* in 1851. But John Adams numbered his retained copies of these letters, which he almost never did; he did not number two shorter letters written to Taylor in this period on a different subject; and instead of entering his retained copies in his letter book, he wrote them out on loose pages and stitched them together. Moreover, every letter was exclusively devoted to disproving Taylor's critique of Adams's republican principles, and the letters were nearly all of the same length. Adams's exceptional treatment of this correspondence must have encouraged his grandson to publish the whole as a continuous work by removing

the datelines from each letter except the first, heading each with a Roman numeral, and supplying the sort of title page common to a political pamphlet.[39]

John Adams's set of replies to John Taylor's *Inquiry* focuses closely on several contested points in his *Defence of the Constitutions*, but the style of these letters clearly resembles his "Discourses on Davila." In the same number of much shorter segments, he first quotes or paraphrases a passage, often just a sentence, from Taylor's *Inquiry*, then offers a rejoinder. The letters are less formally organized than the "Discourses," which scrupulously set substantial passages from Enrico Davila's history in quotation marks before commenting on them. And with much shorter quotations from Taylor, the letters contain a higher proportion of original material than most of the "Discourses." But in one crucial respect they are much alike. Adams apparently began his "Davila" essays with the ambition to comment on an entire long historical work. In his replies to Taylor, he evidently intended to comment on the Virginian's full critique of the *Defence*. In each case, he set out with enormous energy, but gradually lost his enthusiasm and drive, took extended breaks, and eventually terminated the work in frustration. In his much shorter replies to Taylor, Adams ceased writing after commenting on the first dozen pages of the *Inquiry*, and his few specific references to his own *Defence* are to just one of the fifty-seven letters in the first volume of that long work.[40]

Charles Francis Adams had solid reasons for wanting to present his grandfather's letters of 1814–15 to John Taylor as a coherent political argument. Adams's prose is as lively as ever, his forensic talents are on full display, and his illustrative examples, both contemporary and historical, are varied and vivid. Yet his larger argument on the nature of aristocracy resists the concise summation of his 1813 correspondence with Thomas Jefferson on the same subject. By treating virtually every critical reference to his *Defence* in the early pages of Taylor's *Inquiry* as a challenge to defend his views, by taking up each criticism in the order that Taylor presented it, and by quickly composing and dispatching each brief letter before beginning the next, Adams committed himself to writing a commentary rather than the coherent treatise his grandson perhaps hoped for but probably did not really expect.

Yet these thirty-two letters, issuing from Quincy in uneven bursts over nearly a year, and apparently broken off in their author's despair at ever completing his replies to his antagonist, do have several virtues. They advance Adams's exploration of the roots of aristocracy to its furthest point in his nearly four decades of engaging the subject; they show him grappling with the age-old nature-versus-nurture argument at a most fundamental level; and they display a coherence of purpose, from his first letter, which places aristocracy at the center of his concept of government as a mixture of the powers of the One, the Few, and the Many, to the last word of his final letter, which is "aristocracy."[41]

6. John Adams's New Aristocracy

Adams first perceived the problem of aristocracy in a modern republic during the war years immediately following Independence, both in occasional letters written in America in the late 1770s and in equally infrequent letters written in Europe, but focused on America, from 1779 to 1783. When he composed his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States* in 1786–87, however, he largely confined his argument to a consideration of older forms of aristocracy, primarily in Europe over two millennia. From these examples the *Defence* drew two lessons: that politically active aristocracies were an inescapable part of every republic, and that republics could benefit from the talents of aristocracies if they could control the aggressive impulses that were always exhibited by those same aristocracies.[42]

Not until 1790, in his "Discourses on Davila," however, did Adams seek to understand the challenge of republican aristocracy in its new American setting by probing the underlying psychology of aristocratic aspiration. Here, building on Adams Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he explained for the first time the manner in which this aspiration was deeply imbedded in human nature. The source of all social behavior, whether exhibited in economic, political, or even intellectual pursuits, Adams declared, was a thirst for distinction, a struggle to be recognized as superior, in at least some respect, to as many of one's fellow creatures as possible. This struggle, he believed, underlay most human conflict. It also generated the energy and imagination required for every human achievement.[43]

Because both talents and opportunities were unevenly distributed among men, this drive for emulation created conflict, achievement, and hierarchies at every level and in every corner of human activity. In every government, and in republican governments most of all, this inescapable human reality made it imperative to harness aristocratic forces by segregating the few who had the greatest economic and political power in an institution of their own, an "upper" legislative house, and by openly recognizing the superior achievements that benefited society made by any citizen, no matter how elevated or humble, through the awarding of visible marks of distinction. In a republic such rewards—medals, commendations, and appointments to office—would be to individuals only and could not be inherited. But John Adams neither expected nor wished that citizens who were so honored would be immune to a sense of pride, which would elevate the reputation of their families, if their families were already well known, or would help to establish new republican families of distinction (like Adams's own).[44]

After abruptly terminating his "Davila" essays in 1791, Adams foreswore all writing on politics until well into his retirement. But by February 1805, as he revived his friendly correspondence with Dr. Benjamin Rush, he was ready to

take up anew the political themes that had last engaged his attention: the importance of a mixed or balanced republican government, and the nature and role of aristocracy in such a republic. In his opening letter to Rush, he lamented the disastrous effects of unchecked democracy, in both Europe and America. Then in April he drew again the vivid image he had used in letter XXV, entitled "Dr. Franklin," in the first volume of his *Defence of the Constitutions* almost two decades earlier. He asked Rush to imagine a "splendid coach drawn by six fiery coursers . . . in full gallop, constantly lashed by a drunken coachman," as it charged down a steep mountain slope. As in the *Defence*, this coach, "the Franklinian system of government in one center," would have "no horses hitched on behind . . . to check the progress to destruction. This would be too aristocratical." No government in one center, he concluded, was ever hospitable to culture or even to bare literacy, and none would avoid a catastrophic end. The following year he concluded: "I once thought our Constitution was quasi or mixed government, but they have now made it, to all intents and purposes, in virtue, spirit, and effect, a democracy."[45]

Not until 1808, however, did Adams begin to expand on the role of aristocracy in a republic in his letters to Dr. Rush. The timing of this initiative was probably not accidental. President Thomas Jefferson's bitter struggle with Great Britain over maritime rights had reached a crisis, and while John Adams reluctantly supported the Embargo, hated Britain's impressment of British-born sailors serving on American ships, and sincerely sympathized with his old friend and rival's desperate situation, he believed that Jefferson had made a mess of his administration by endorsing an unbalanced democratic republic. The spring of 1808, with Jefferson's second term coming to an end and many citizens turning their thoughts to selecting his successor, was a season for critically appraising America's political health, and Adams had plenty of company. His letter of 18 April to Dr. Rush, which opened his discussion of aristocracy, came just six days after Senator Hillhouse proposed the amendments to the Constitution that Adams would critically examine later in the year.[46]

Adams's assessment of aristocracy in his letters to Benjamin Rush was hardly systematic; it thoroughly partook of the casual and impassioned character of their whole correspondence. But by reintroducing the subject into his current thoughts, he opened the way for more original commentary over the next decade. Adams closed his letter of 18 April with a postscript, in which he elaborated on both an observation and a wish that he had often made over the past two decades: "An aristocracy of wealth, without any check but a democracy of licentiousness, is our curse. I wish that aristocracy was in a hole, guarded by Hercules with his club on one side and an honest people with their million hands on the other. The eternal intrigues of our monied and landed and *slaved* aristocracy are and will be our ruin. I will be neither aristocrat nor democrat without a mediator between the two. With such a mediator I will be both." In

July he returned to the subject, condemned America's aristocrats and democrats alike for exercising arbitrary power whenever they held the reins of government, and declared that "Wisdom and justice can never be promoted till the President's office, instead of being a doll and a whistle, shall be made more independent and more respectable; capable of mediating between two infuriated parties."[47]

At about this point in his ongoing correspondence with Rush, Adams made his first attempt to publish a political essay since the 1790s. In his 1808 review of Senator Hillhouse's proposed amendments to the Constitution, which a Federalist editor in Boston declined to publish, he summed up the convictions about aristocracy that he had advanced in his *Defence of the Constitutions* and "Discourses on Davila." Hillhouse had argued that because the United States had no hereditary succession, it did not "possess the materials for forming an aristocracy" and therefore lacked "the means of making an aristocratical branch to our government." Adams replied that, as history demonstrated, hereditary succession was not necessary in forming or maintaining an aristocracy; that America did have one crucial ingredient for making an aristocracy, "wealth"; and that it did have an aristocratic branch of government, the United States Senate. He then addressed the persistence of political parties in America and the determination of both national parties to recruit both aristocrats and democrats into their ranks.[48]

Adams did not again consider the nature of aristocracy in a formal argument for several years, but he returned to the matter several times in his letters to Dr. Rush. In March 1809 he lamented, as he had since the 1790s, the arrogance of the aristocratic Senate as it intruded upon the functions of the executive, in this case by refusing to approve President James Madison's nomination of John Quincy Adams as minister to Russia. In October, he risked Dr. Rush's indignation by suggesting that "there is as much in the breed of men as there is in that of horses," a theme he would return to in his correspondence with Jefferson, but he promptly denied that he was thereby arguing for a hereditary nobility. And in December 1810, he revealed how central a role aristocracy had come to play in his political thought:

> Every government is an aristocracy in fact. The despotism of Genghis Kahn was an aristocracy. The government of the most popular French convention or national assembly was an aristocracy. The most democratical canton in Switzerland was an aristocracy. The most leveling town meeting in New England is an aristocracy. The empire of Napoleon is an aristocracy. The government of Great Britain is an aristocracy. But as they, The Aristocrats, are always ambitious and avaricious, the rivalries among them split them into factions and tear the people to pieces. The great secret of liberty is to find means to limit their power and control their passions.[49]

If all these governments, old and new, large and small, despotisms, monarchies, and republics—and even New England town meetings—were aristocracies, could aristocracy have any meaning in either political theory or political history? But perhaps a prior question to answer is: What meaning had the word aristocracy taken on for John Adams since he first began to consider the matter at length in the 1780s?

The fullest answer to this question lies in two rich sources that followed shortly on the unexpected death of Dr. Rush: Adams's renewed and burgeoning correspondence with Thomas Jefferson, and his series of letters to John Taylor of Caroline. But an early key to this answer lies in another Adams letter to Rush that predates nearly all his references in their correspondence to aristocracy. In November 1807, capping an exchange of several letters that assessed the career of George Washington, a man whose virtues Adams both respected and envied, and whom Rush actually hated, but whom neither could ignore even years after his death, Adams ventured a list of the talents behind Washington's political and military success, which he itemized as follows:

> 1. An handsome face. That this is a talent I can prove by the authority of a thousand instances in all ages. 2. A tall stature, like the Hebrew sovereign chosen because he was taller by a head than the other Jews. 3. An elegant form. 4. Graceful attitudes and movements. 5. A large, imposing fortune consisting of a great landed estate left him by his father and brother, besides a large jointure with his lady, and in addition to all this, immense tracts of land of his own acquisition. There is nothing, except bloody battles and splendid victories, to which mankind bow down with more reverence than to great fortune. 6. Washington was a Virginian. This is equivalent to five talents. Virginian geese are all Swans. 7. Washington was preceded by favorable anecdotes. 8. He possessed the gift of silence. This I esteem as one of the most precious talents. 9. He had great self-command. It cost him a great exertion sometimes, and a constant constraint, but to preserve so much equanimity as he did required a great capacity. 10. Whenever he lost his temper as he did sometimes, either love or fear in those about him induced then to conceal his weakness from the world. Here you see I have made out ten talents without saying a word about reading, thinking, or writing [upon which faculties Rush had been critical of Washington]. You see I use the word talents in a larger sense than usual, comprehending every advantage.[50]

This potent fusion of inherited and acquired ingredients together made a truly imposing aristocrat, although the word appears nowhere in this letter. Washington's character was a perfect marriage of what Adams had earlier called, in the first volume of his *Defence of the Constitutions*, "the principles of authority, virtues of the mind and heart: wisdom, prudence, courage, patience, temperance, justice"; and "the principles of power, the goods of fortune: riches,

extraction, knowledge, reputation." For nearly six more years, he let this expanded concept of aristocracy alone, but in 1813, Thomas Jefferson unintentionally prodded Adams to take up the subject anew.[51]

In the spring of his seventy-eighth year, at a time of life when most changes are the product of external accidents rather than personal design, John Adams was surprised by two more. When he heard of the death of Dr. Benjamin Rush on 23 April 1813, in the midst of their flourishing correspondence, his initially promising exchange with Thomas Jefferson had been languishing for several months. But in late May, Rush's death prompted Jefferson's first letter to Adams since December. Just two days later, the unexpected receipt of the memoirs of a prominent English Unitarian supplied a theme for Adams's first letter to Jefferson since January. Thereafter, their correspondence exploded, with thirty-two more letters that year, and never less than eight in any succeeding year until the 1820s, when age began to take a heavy toll on both Founders. The second accident, receiving the Reverend Thomas Lindsey's memoirs, did more than inspire Adams's pen; an appendix to that volume contained an 1801 letter from Jefferson to Joseph Priestley that contained a criticism of Adams as president. To explain his remark, Jefferson finally reentered the political arena with his old rival. In mid-June, he ventured his first observations on his differences with Adams in the 1790s, just as Adams was writing his most political letter to date.[52]

The new temper of their exchange quickly opened a more candid and substantial correspondence. On 25 June, Adams stressed the importance of political checks and balances in curbing religious enthusiasm and intolerance, which he saw on the rise in Boston. On 27 June, Jefferson wrote his most important letter of their renewed correspondence to date, which opened with the image of Theocritus's woodcutter, whose despair over which tree he should cut first mirrored Jefferson's dismay at the forest of opinions confronting him in republican America—and indeed, in John Adams's letters. But Jefferson, quickly recovering his equanimity, wrote a concise description of American politics, and of his political relationship to Adams, at three crucial points, in 1776, in 1787, and in the 1790s. The national issue confronting them, he said, was always "whether the power of the people, or that of the *aristoi* [aristocrats] should prevail," a question that he saw as enduring from ancient Greece to the present. In his narrative, Adams stood firm with Jefferson and the American people for independence, and Jefferson defended his own initially lukewarm support for the Constitution, before he addressed the painful decade of the 1790s, when he found himself in opposition to his old friend. Jefferson finessed this awkward chapter in their mutual narrative by claiming—both implausibly and disingenuously—that virtually all the unpleasantness and misunderstanding of that decade was the fault of various partisans, not of Adams and Jefferson themselves.[53]

As Thomas Jefferson finally moved into partisan territory, John Adams met him more than halfway. On 14 June, he defended the "Alien Law" of 1798, which

Jefferson had criticized in his 1801 letter to Joseph Priestley that appeared in the appendix to Rev. Lindsey's memoirs, and astonishingly implied that Vice President Jefferson, because he had signed the bill as presiding officer of the Senate, was "as responsible for it" as President Adams who, unlike Jefferson, had the power to veto it. On 25 June, he briefly defended checks and balances, "however you and your party may have ridiculed them," as a vital check against both civil and religious excesses. On 28 June, he explained his reply to a 1798 patriotic address to the president, which he claimed Jefferson, in his 1801 letter to Priestley, had misinterpreted as dismissive of the possibility of scientific progress, and cited the Preface to his *Defence of the Constitutions* as proof of his faith in the advancement of knowledge. And on 30 June, he passionately disputed Jefferson's remark, in his letter of 15 June, that "the terrorism of the day"—the federal assaults on civil liberties in the 1790s—had been "felt by one party only," citing Shays's Rebellion (1786–87), the pro-French rallies in Philadelphia inspired by Citizen Genet (1793), the Whiskey Rebellion (1794), the protests against President Adams's "Fast Day" of 1799, and Fries Rebellion of the same year, as popular terrorism endured by Federalists for over a decade. He concluded, however, with the observation that the terrors of government suppression and of popular protest were the tools of both parties, and he condemned the antiwar, anti–Democratic-Republican activity in Massachusetts in 1812–13 as just as pernicious to the nation as the anti-Federalist Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions and the Democratic-Republican circular letters of southern congressmen in 1798–99.[54]

On 9 July, in his first response to Jefferson's letter of 27 June, Adams acknowledged the challenge in coping with aristocracy: "Your *aristoi* are the most difficult Animals to manage, of anything in the whole Theory and practice of Government. They will not suffer themselves to be governed. They not only exert all their own Subtilty Industry and courage, but they employ the Commonality, to knock to pieces every Plan and Model that the most honest Architects in Legislation can invent to keep them within bounds." But immediately he inquired: "[W]ho are these *aristoi*? Who shall judge? Who shall select these choice Spirits from the rest of the Congregation? Themselves? We must first find out and determine who themselves are." He then turned to a favorite observation by the Greek poet Theognis: "Nobility in Men is worth as much as it is in Horses Asses or Rams: but the meanest blooded Puppy, in the World, if he gets a little money, is as good a man as the rest of them." He closed with a sober thought: "Birth and Wealth together have prevailed over Virtue and Talents in all ages. The Many, will acknowledge no other *aristoi*."[55]

For the next month, during which Adams was more interested in exploring religion than politics with Jefferson, he said little more about the *aristoi*, beyond agreeing with his old friend that the struggle between the forces of aristocracy and democracy had persisted without interruption for over two millennia. He

did revisit the 1780s to remember his dismay at the Marquis de Lafayette's political ignorance in an evening's conversation at Jefferson's Paris lodgings, attended by John Quincy Adams and himself, and he noted that Lafayette's ill-informed opinions had prompted him, with Jefferson's encouragement, to write on aristocracy. At several points, he related his decision to write his *Defence of the Constitutions* to the dangerous political naiveté of the French.[56]

In mid-August, however, Adams felt ready to explore the rich subject of aristocracy anew. He opened a letter with another quotation from Theognis, on the importance of marrying into a good family, and the power of wealth to tempt many men to ignore this wisdom. Adams then defended this most traditional of all definitions of aristocracy, and the most contested in republican America. Language itself, he declared, showed that veneration for the wellborn was deeply embedded in both the ancient and modern cultures of the Western political tradition, and was still valid in Virginia and "every other State in the Union," as well as in "every Nation civilized and savage, from all We know of the time of the Creation of the World."[57]

Adams's distress at the death of his daughter Nabby on 15 August cut short this letter, but in September he took up Theognis again, quoting the lines that followed those in his August letter to develop the principal complicating factor in the creation of aristocracy: "Nor does a Woman disdain to be the Wife of a bad rich Man. But She prefers a Man of Property before a good Man. For Riches are honoured; and a good Man marries from a bad Family, and a bad Man from a good one. Wealth mingles all races." He next brought beauty into the aristocratic circle, and at last pronounced a sweeping political and social formula: "The five Pillars of Aristocracy, are Beauty, Wealth, Birth, Genius and Virtues. Any one of the three first, can at any time over bear any one or both of the two last."[58]

In July 1791, John Adams first complained to Thomas Jefferson that, after sixteen years of friendship, he still did not know "what your Idea is of the best form of Government." Twenty-two years later, on 28 October 1813, Jefferson finally answered Adams's question in one of his most splendid letters. After a few amusing observations on the purpose of Theognis's verse in Adams's recent letters, he turned to his old friend's concept of aristocracy. Jefferson first distinguished between a natural aristocracy of virtue, which he believed America encouraged, and "an artificial aristocracy founded on wealth and birth, without either virtue or talents," the aristocracy of Europe that America had mercifully escaped. Next, in a passage that showed he was quite familiar with Adams's political thought, but could not assent to his friend's political definitions or understand the ideas behind them, he set out their contrasting views of a good government. Adams, he said, wished "to put the Pseudo-aristoi into a separate chamber of legislation where they may be hindered from doing mischief by their coordinate branches, and where also they may be a protection to wealth against

the Agrarian and plundering enterprises of the Majority of the people." Jefferson regarded senates quite differently. Those bodies, he argued, could as easily harm their "coordinate branches"—houses of representatives, governors, and presidents—as be contained by them. He believed that "the best remedy is exactly that provided by our constitutions, to leave to the citizens the free election and separation of the aristoi from the pseudo-aristoi, of the wheat from the chaff." He then ventured the supposition that his political differences with Adams arose from the different societies in which they lived and concluded that New England had a greater problem with aristocracy than Virginia because its wealthy members were allied with an influential clergy, which Virginia fortunately lacked.[59]

On 15 November, Adams answered Jefferson's long letter with an even longer reply. "We are now explicitly agreed," he declared, "That 'there is a natural Aristocracy among men; the grounds of which are Virtue and Talents.'" But Adams cautioned that "tho' We have agreed in one point, in Words, it is not yet certain that We are perfectly agreed in Sense." The crucial issue was the meaning of "Talents." In a close reprise of his remarkable letter of 1807 to Dr. Rush, on George Washington's political assets, he explained that "Education, Wealth, Strength, Beauty, Stature, Birth, Marriage, graceful Attitudes and Motions, Gait, Air, Complexion, Physiognomy, are Talents, as well as Genius and Science and learning. Any one of these Talents, that in fact commands or influences true Votes in Society, gives to the Man who possesses it, the Character of an Aristocrat, in my Sense of the Word." The essence of aristocracy, he argued, as he had often before, was the power of any man to obtain "one Vote in Addition to his own, by his Birth, Fortune, Figure, Eloquence, Science, learning, Craft, Cunning, or even his Character for good fellowship and a bon vivant."[60]

Adams devoted the remainder of his long letter to describing a variety of aristocrats and aristocracies, according to their origins and locations. The Scottish patriot warrior William Wallace owed his superiority simply to his strength. Mrs. Hamilton, the mistress of Admiral Nelson—a forerunner of Eliza Doolittle in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*—rose from a life selling vegetables in London's streets entirely by her beauty, a means of promotion that she shared, in Adams's appraisal, with Hannah, Deborah, and Judith in the Old Testament, Helen in ancient Greece, Madame Maintenon in *ancien régime* France, and Mrs. Fitzherbert, the mistress/wife of the Prince of Wales, in modern Britain. What Jefferson had done, in Adams's view, was to create an idealized meritocracy, faithfully endorsed and preserved by a disinterested republican electorate.[61]

What both history and contemporary America actually showed, however, was a host of local aristocracies founded on, and fueled and replenished by, the full range of the most basic human appetites: for sexual pleasure, for material comforts, and, as Adam Smith had taught him, for social distinction. He saw

aristocracies everywhere, from democratic Rhode Island to gentrified Virginia, with rivalries between leading families in every state. Jefferson's faith in "pure" elections was too often a mere fantasy, contradicted by the corrupt campaigns of Aaron Burr for the presidency in 1800, and of De Witt Clinton for the presidency "last year." The most recent driver of American aristocracy was, in Adams's view (and here he must have believed that Jefferson would agree), one of the worst, the banking system of "Duer, Robert and Governeur Morris, Hamilton, and Washington." Once they were established, every one of these aristocracies, no matter how simple or mean their origin, exerted so powerful an effect over the common people that old Massachusetts families and old Virginia families, even those with Loyalists in their ranks, still commanded a high respect in the young republic.[62]

Adams concluded:

> Your distinction between natural and artificial Aristocracy does not appear to me well founded. Birth and Wealth are conferred on some Men, as imperiously by Nature, as Genius, Strength or Beauty. . . . When Aristocracies, are established by human Laws and honour Wealth and Power are made hereditary by municipal Laws and political Institutions, then I acknowledge artificial Aristocracy to commence: but this never commences, till Corruption in Elections becomes dominant and uncontroulable. But this artificial Aristocracy can never last. The everlasting Envys, Jealousies, Rivalries and quarrels among them, their cruel rapacities upon the poor ignorant People their followers, compel these to sett up Caesar, a Demagogue to be a Monarch and Master, pour mettre chacun a sa place [to put each in his place]. Here you have the origin of all artificial Aristocracy, which is the origin of all Monarchy. And both artificial Aristocracy, and Monarchy, and civil, military, political and hierarchical Despotism, have all grown out of the natural Aristocracy of "Virtues and Talents."[63]

Thomas Jefferson's letter of 28 October and John Adams's reply of 15 November powerfully summarize the essence of each Founder's political creed. In placing his hopes in a natural aristocracy of talent and virtue, supported by a pure, uncorrupted electorate that would reliably recognize and select that aristocracy for public office, Jefferson declared his faith in America as a moral meritocracy. Adams was convinced that faith was naive. For over three decades, in his *Defence of the Constitutions* (1787–88), in his "Discourses on Davila" (1790–91), in brief unpublished essays written during his retirement, and in his late correspondences with Dr. Benjamin Rush and with Jefferson himself, he had been trying to understand the inner workings of aristocracy in society and government. The final destination of this long journey of discovery was a lesson that neither Jefferson nor most Americans wanted to hear. While they put their trust in the nation's natural aristocracy, Adams taught that in all its multiple origins

and forms, both high and low, aristocracy was simply natural. Aristocratic aspirations existed in every nation and every society, and were pursued by everyone who had the means to pursue them. And like all ubiquitous human behavior, aristocracy's moral quality and benefit to society varied widely, according to the character of the society of which it was a part, and of the government under which it functioned.

By December 1813, Adams had sated his appetite for teaching his old friend the mysteries of aristocracy, but he was not ready to abandon the subject forever. In the spring of 1814, when he initiated his long series of brief letters to John Taylor of Caroline to refute that author's critique of his *Defence of the Constitutions*, aristocracy quickly moved to the center of his argument. He opened with Taylor's claim, on the first page of his *Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States*, that "Mr. Adams's political system deduces government from a *natural* fate; the policy of the United States deduces it from *moral* liberty." Anyone familiar with the development of Adams's political thought and the rhetoric of the early republic could probably guess what Taylor was implying, but Adams professed profound puzzlement. The word *fate*, he argued, had no coherent intellectual content, and that most precious political possession, *liberty*, was the capacity to choose either moral or immoral objectives. This was equally true, he explained, under each of the only five forms of government known to him: despotism, limited monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, and some mixture "of the second, third, and fourth species."[64]

In his second letter, Adams quickly disposed of Taylor's musings on "mind," "body," and "morals" with the rigor of a natural philosopher, declaring: "The essence and substance of mind and body, of soul and body, of spirit and matter, are wholly withheld as yet from our knowledge; from the penetration of our sharpest faculties; from the keenest of our incision knives, the most amplifying of our microscopes." He then distinguished between *natural aristocracy*, which included "those superiorities of influence in society which grow out of the constitution of human nature," and *artificial aristocracy*, "those inequalities of weight and superiorities of influence which are created and established by civil laws." To this he added, in his fourth letter, his long-standing definition of aristocracy itself: "By an aristocrat, I mean every man who can command or influence TWO VOTES; ONE BESIDES HIS OWN."[65]

His most striking passage, however, appeared in his third letter. Adams's repeated insistence over some three decades that aristocracy was both ubiquitous and inevitable in human societies accords with the common view of his contemporaries and modern scholars alike that he viewed all human variation as a product of nature over nurture. This oversimplifies his views; since the 1780s he had readily conceded that the manner in which particular men and women were raised, and the resources available to them in their youth, significantly determined their membership in, or exclusion from, any society's aristocracy

when they reached adulthood. But on 19 April, he granted to nature one of the strongest endorsements in all his writings. Upon visiting a foundlings' hospital in Paris, probably in 1785, he saw

> fifty babies in one room;—all under four days old; all in cradles alike; all nursed and attended alike; all dressed alike; all equally neat. I went from one end to the other of the whole row, and attentively observed all their countenances. And I never saw a greater variety, or more striking inequalities, in the streets of London or Paris. Some had every sign of grief, sorrow, and despair; others had joy and gayety in their faces. Some were sinking in the arms of death; others looked as if they might live to fourscore. Some were as ugly and others as beautiful, as children or adults ever are; these were stupid; those sensible. They were all born to equal rights, but to very different fortunes; to very different successes and influence in life.[66]

From this observation, John Adams drew the obvious lesson about natural versus political equality:

> That all men are born to equal rights is true. Every being has a right to his own, as clear, as moral, as sacred, as any other being has. This is as indubitable as a moral government in the universe. But to teach that all men are born with equal powers and faculties, to equal influence in society, to equal property and advantages through life, is as gross a fraud, as glaring an imposition on the credulity of the people, as ever was practiced by monks, by Druids, by Brahmins, by priests of the immortal Lama, or by the self-styled philosophers of the French revolution.

In his fourth and fifth letters, Adams applied this lesson to a thought experiment. Proposing that Taylor take "the first hundred men you meet in the streets of a city," he stipulated that among "your new democratic republic" would be found five sets of six men each, one with independent fortunes, another of exceptional eloquence, a third possessed of much learning, a fourth enjoying all three advantages, and a fifth whose members would have "more art, intrigue, and cunning, than learning, eloquence, and fortune." These men would be "an aristocracy of THIRTY" among the one hundred, and would quickly dominate the whole.[67]

Through additional stages in the working of this natural political process, this initial aristocracy would become concentrated into an oligarchy and would eventually divide into two factions, each headed by an exceptionally talented individual who sought maximum power. As examples, he paired Danton and Robespierre, Pompey and Caesar, and Anthony and Augustus, to whom he added America's leading presidential contestants of 1796, 1800, and 1812: "Jefferson and Adams," "Burr and Jefferson," and "Clinton and Madison," a projection of his principle that may appear somewhat less fanciful if one remembers

that for John Adams, the American president was in fact, and should properly be, an elective monarch. Such was the eternally unequal condition of human society that any durable republic must somehow be able to tame these ambitious forces to preserve both individual liberty and the safety and health of the larger community.[68]

Adams's next two letters, written in June, considered both natural inequalities and wealth as foundations of aristocracy. He began by dismissing Taylor's charge that he had ever written "that every society naturally produces an order of men, which it is impossible to confine to an equality of RIGHTS." What he actually believed, he declared, was that: "All that men can do, is to modify, organize, and arrange the powers of human society, that is to say, the physical strength and force of men, in the best manner to protect, secure, and cherish the moral, which are all the natural rights of mankind." He then turned to families, in which many nominally equal siblings were in fact quite unequal in their physical and mental capacities. Aspiring families often allied through marriage, combining their resources so that one or more of their most talented members might have a substantial material base for a public career. In a bold move, Adams cited as proof of his point Taylor's own marriage to a North Carolina heiress, to which he added the advantageous marriages of Washington and Jefferson.[69]

The next several letters dealt with government itself and, in particular, with America's federal edifice. Adams opened his eighth letter with a pointed interrogation: "Is not representation an essential and fundamental departure from democracy? Is not every representative government in the universe an aristocracy?" He denied that in his *Defence of the Constitutions* he had sought to bring the "system of America" within England's system of government, declaring that in 1787 America had as yet no national system of government. What he was defending was America's state governors and legislatures, especially Massachusetts's governor and Senate, which could hardly be considered a monarch and a fixed aristocratic order because both were annually elective. His larger goal was always to defend a balanced government of "the one, the few, and the many." He also denied that in respect to espousing sound moral principles, the U.S. Constitution was fundamentally different from several recent—if less successful—European constitutions, and he set himself firmly against a nearly universal belief of his countrymen by flatly denying America's political exceptionalism.[70]

In his *Inquiry*, Taylor had objected that Adams's system in the *Defence* complicated democratic practice by introducing obstructive balances of power. In his tenth letter, Adams replied: "Is there a constitution on record more complicated with balances than ours?" He then enumerated eight such balances, or "oppositions," in America's federal-state system of government: states versus nation; House versus Senate; executive versus legislature; judiciary versus legislature, executive, and states; Senate versus president (in appointments and

treaties, the only balance Adams disliked); the people versus their representatives in biennial elections (which he wished had been made annual); the state legislatures versus the senators whom they chose in sexennial elections; and the presidential electors versus the legislatures or the people who chose them. Everywhere in this complex machinery, Adams saw democratic, aristocratic, and monarchical elements all mixed together, just as they should be in any stable government.[71]

After two more letters, having refuted several criticisms of his *Defence* that appeared on just the first four pages of Taylor's massive text, Adams broke off for three months. His next cluster of letters, running from late November into late December, briefly surveyed monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy as essential elements in any free republic. Each of these elements, whenever it was the sole basis of any government, was abusive, violent, and unstable. A pure democracy, he believed, would become the most dramatic violator of individual rights, but for the shortest time, because its excesses would lead quickly to anarchy, followed by oligarchy or tyranny. Either aristocracy or monarchy, because they were more stable, would violate freedom with lesser intensity, but over longer periods of time.[72]

Taylor, he continued, had made two fundamental errors in his *Inquiry*. The first was "to consider hereditary descent as essential to monarchy and aristocracy." The second was to believe that monarchical authority must be of unlimited duration, when it could be just as effective over any given unit of time. It could be bestowed by election as well as inheritance, and limited to four years, as in the federal government, or to one, as in Massachusetts and other states. In this series of letters Adams made several specific references to his *Defence* and one to his recent correspondence with Jefferson. And in his sixteenth letter, of 14 December 1814, in a brief survey of the burnings of libraries as instances of the damage to accumulated human knowledge inflicted by political disorder, he referred to the destruction of the Library of Congress in the recent sack of Washington, D.C. (August 1814), a disaster that he blamed in part on America's persistent difficulties with political parties, which "arrest our efforts and appall our hopes in pursuit of political good."[73]

Then, just as the year was ending, Adams began a sustained exploration of the major determinants of aristocracy that would dominate his last dozen letters to Taylor. He opened his twenty-first letter with an aggressive defense of the innate existence of human inequality by demanding that Taylor answer three questions: Were there physical inequalities evident in men, from birth to grave? Were there intellectual inequalities evident in men, "from the first opening of the senses . . . to the final loss of all sense?" Were there moral inequalities, "discernable almost, if not quite, from the original innocence [i.e., of new born children] to the last stage of guilt and depravity?" The remainder of this letter, and most of the next, supplied several historical instances of men with widely

differing abilities, primarily intellectual, and the resulting differences in their cultural, social, and political influence, before opening a discussion of the development of classes of educated men as the foundations of aristocracies. Adams closed this twenty-second letter with a brief defense of the old term *wellborn*, which had become unfashionable in America since the Revolution. This led him, in his ten remaining letters, to a broader consideration of three major contextual determinants of aristocracy that, in contrast to the innate features, temperaments, and capacities that he had observed—and predicted—in Paris's foundling hospital, were not strictly inborn.[74]

Of John Adams's three concluding foundations of aristocracy—birth, wealth, and knowledge—American society has for nearly two centuries paid the least respect to the first, categorically in theory and substantially—although not consistently—in practice. Adams, however, thought it the most important of the three, and he devoted three detailed letters to the benefits of a favorable birth, in nearly twenty numbered points. This preference accorded well with the prejudices of his correspondent, a wellborn Virginia planter who despised all nonlanded wealth, as well as with Adams's own small-town, patriarchal, filiopietistic biases. In the broader sense in which Adams considered the advantages of birth, those advantages have never been completely erased by the rise of America's democratic ethos or entirely obscured even by the nation's two most widely revered "ill-born" leaders, Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln. And in the political world, at least, the advantages of birth and family appear to have made somewhat of a comeback over the past century.[75]

In 1815, however, Adams himself had little doubt of the prime importance of birth into a "good family." While admitting that it was often difficult to untangle the advantages of birth from wealth in determining the foundations of any individual's influence in society, he placed birth ahead of wealth because it was, he felt, more intimately "derived from ancestors," descended more reliably to posterity, and was, unlike wealth, "inalienable" so long as the members of that posterity did not positively disgrace themselves. As proof of the power of its appeal, he listed the nearly universal respect for the wellborn at every level of society; the common regard for industrious and prudent parents and the inclination to extend that good opinion to their children; the naming of attractive or elevated sites, both urban and rural, after famous men; the granting, by many political leaders, of historic or romantic names to their personal residences including, in Virginia alone, Richard Henry Lee's "Chantilly," James Madison's "Montpelier," Thomas Jefferson's "Monticello," and Taylor' own "Hazlewood"; the proliferation of monuments in churchyards; and the display in the homes of prominent families of portraits and memorabilia of their ancestors. More broadly, Adams argued that men of good birth were easily accepted as leaders by all social classes in every culture, while leaders of quite modest origins—here he cited Napoleon—were almost universally disrespected, and by the prominent

resented, for their social obscurity. Although "birth confers no right on one more than another," a favorable birth "naturally and unavoidably produces more influence in society," and that "superiority of influence is aristocracy."[76]

In his twenty-sixth letter, Adams introduced aristocracy's second foundation with a denial that he had ever discounted wealth as a major source of aristocratic influence. Taylor, Adams concluded, placed the importance of wealth over that of birth, but Adams refuted this, in part by saying that being of distinguished birth need not be announced by title or ribbons, or accompanied by exceptional wealth, because it was indestructibly preserved "in history and records," and thus was always available as a resource for its possessor. Only in the most radical utopian societies imagined in Plato's *Republic* and "the French republic," which envisioned communities of wives that could make a child's paternity unknown, would the influence of birth be erased. In his next letter, Adams flatly rejected Taylor's value-laden distinction between varieties of wealth, from landed estates (the best), through mercantile fortunes (inferior), to windfalls from banking, paper money, and corporations (the worst). Adams did not object to Taylor's hatred of banks, which he fully shared. But to use a modern term, he argued that all wealth was essentially fungible. Wealth, like liberty, could be variously acquired and variously employed. Neither the relative morality of the means of its acquisition nor the morality of the manner of its employment could fundamentally affect the fact that wealth created influence in society, and again, influence was aristocracy.[77]

Adams's next two letters formed a bridge between his consideration of the material foundations of aristocracy—favorable birth and substantial wealth—and its intellectual support. Taylor had argued that the transfer of landed estates from old families to new men was an essential means of undermining aristocracy, and that the rise of printing had facilitated this transfer, which he labeled alienation. Adams rejected both claims. Alienation of land or any form of wealth, he declared, was simply the transfer of a fundamental support of aristocracy from one man or class of men to another. Once this transfer had occurred, the defining core of aristocratic power—enhanced political and social influence—simply moved from one, often older, aristocracy to another, often newer one. He then argued that the increased alienation of landed property from one set of men to another in modern Europe had nothing to do with the rise of printing or with any other means of disseminating knowledge more broadly. This brought him to his last topic.[78]

His thirtieth and thirty-first letters were largely devoted to disproving the relationship between the expansion of learning and alterations in the relative power of different social classes. Adams still believed, as he had since the 1760s, that improved education at every level and every increase in the spread of knowledge were both generally beneficial to humanity and particularly beneficial to the democratic portion of society, that is, to the common people who, unlike

aristocrats, had no power to influence other men. But while this increase in knowledge improved the lives of the people and enhanced their ability to be effective citizens in a republic, it did not greatly increase their power relative to aristocrats, and it effected no direct reduction in the power of aristocrats. Adams supported this contention in two ways. The first was to argue that the control of the powerful new art of printing, and of new educational, intellectual, and artistic institutions of all kinds, was always in the hands of the wealthy and powerful. His second argument, and the last he would ever make concerning aristocracy, brought his thought full circle, back to his earliest writings.[79]

Adams devoted his last letter in this series, written in early March after another break in his correspondence, entirely to the role of knowledge in society. He began by rejecting the fashionable argument of Rousseau that knowledge was a corruption that drew men away from their "perfection in the savage state." His own belief was that knowledge promoted virtue and happiness everywhere, and he would extend this benefit to all, even to "your own domestics and John Randolph's serfs," that is, to every chattel slave in Virginia. "I fear not the propagation and dissemination of knowledge. The conditions of humanity will be improved and ameliorated by its expansion and diffusion in every direction. May every human being,—man, woman, and child,—be as well informed as possible!" Here John Adams, this venerable son of the Enlightenment, echoes the optimism of his youth, when he concluded his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* (1765) with a ringing appeal to "let every sluice of knowledge be open'd and set a flowing."[80]

But for John Adams the clear-eyed realist, knowledge, like every human talent, had a downside. He asked Taylor: "[D]id you ever see a rose without a briar, a convenience without an inconvenience, a good without an evil, in this mingled world?" Knowledge could be used for good or ill, and "knaves and hypocrites" who would employ every other innate and acquired talent for ill would not fail to wield knowledge to the same end. Moreover, at the heart of his view of the workings of aristocracy in society was his conviction that even well-intentioned learned men, like every other group of men with exceptional talents, had themselves always been an aristocracy. This would always be so because no increase in knowledge would ever make all men equal in knowledge. And like any aristocracy, the learned would divide into competing factions that would contend as passionately over both ideas and the control of academies and educational institutions as merchants and planters competed for the control of money and land. The obvious conclusion from this observation made an appropriate close for Adams's entire series to Taylor: "Knowledge, therefore, as well as genius, strength, activity, industry, beauty, and twenty other things, will forever be a natural cause of aristocracy."[81]

With the conclusion of his letters to John Taylor, Adams finally completed the materials needed to formulate the basic elements of his vision of aristocracy

in a republic. Those materials stretched over nearly three decades of his writing career in some half dozen public and private statements, including his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States* (1787–88), his "Discourses on Davila" (1790–91), his correspondences with Benjamin Rush (1805–1813), with Mercy Otis Warren (1807), and with Thomas Jefferson (1812–1826), and his review of Senator Hillhouse's amendments (1808), culminating in his last major political writing, his correspondence with Taylor (1814–15).

A dozen fundamental convictions constituted the core of John Adams's conception of aristocracy:

1. Aristocracy is ubiquitous in time and place, a fundamental part of the social structure of every nation in every age, of every political community within every nation, and of every voluntary social or cultural association, large or small.
2. In all republics, including monarchies of a republican character, an aristocracy (the Few) is one of the three major components of government, along with the executive (the One), and the people (the Many).
3. Aristocracy originates in two essential features of the human species: natural (innate) inequalities of many kinds, some observable even at birth; and the universal human desire, at every social level, no matter how humble, to be recognized as having some superiority over others.
4. Aristocracies emerge as stronger, more intelligent, more handsome or beautiful men and women, and all those with any other talent of character or personality, begin to employ those assets and talents to assert their superiority over others.
5. Aristocracies develop greater visibility and durability as their members apply their superior talents to the acquisition of greater material possessions, from the most permanent, primarily productive land worked by others, to the most ephemeral, such as luxurious clothing, all of which give them social distinction and often political power over others.
6. Aristocracies constantly recruit new members, individuals of relatively humble birth who possess superior innate talents and a desire for greater social recognition. This process is a natural counterpart to the decline in power and status of less talented and assertive children of aristocratic parents.
7. The essence of an aristocracy's political power in a republic is the capacity of each of its members, by whatever means, to command the vote of at least one other political actor, whether a common citizen or a legislator. Every person who is elected to office is an aristocrat, and every person who can influence several elected officials is a more powerful aristocrat.
8. John Adams saw every one of the conditions and processes of items 1 through 7 as *natural*; therefore, aristocracy in its largest sense is a natural, not an artificial, social, and political phenomenon.

9. An artificial or—in Jefferson's language—a pseudo-aristocracy is any group whose social and political distinction relies heavily for its support on civil laws, particularly those that create heritable titles, restrict the inheritance of land, grant commercial monopolies, and erect privileged institutions, all of which have their origin in growing political corruption. These aristocracies are both unnecessary and harmful in any republic, or in any government that claims to be in some measure free.
10. Aristocracies, insofar as they are natural, can be sources of great benefit to society because their members possess exceptional abilities and because humbly born men who have exceptional talents are eager to exercise those talents in order to join those aristocracies.
11. Even natural aristocracies, however, can threaten the health and the very existence of any republic or free government because their most aggressive members, and aspirants to membership, may place their desire to acquire wealth and political power above any sense of obligation to serve the public good.
12. Therefore, aristocracies, which are essentially a natural phenomenon and cannot be destroyed, must be harnessed for the public good by the public recognition of meritorious services that its members perform for society and, at the same time, must be controlled by placing their most prominent political members in a distinct branch of government, an upper legislative house, where they, the Few, can be carefully watched over by the executive (the One), and by the people (the Many), both as common citizens and through their representatives in a lower legislative house.

7. A Constitutional Farewell

In the fall of 1820, four decades after Massachusetts had refined and approved John Adams's constitution, the Commonwealth held another convention to consider revisions to that foundation. In the years since its ratification, Massachusetts's Constitution of 1780 had drawn repeated criticism and had even become a target of Shays's Rebellion, yet it had never been amended. In 1795, the year designated by the document for its first critical review, the voters had declined to make any changes. By 1820, however, the decision of the inhabitants of the District of Maine to seek admission to the federal union as a separate state (to which the Massachusetts legislature assented), and the growing popular demand for a more democratic government, prompted the call for a new constitutional convention.[82]

In October, the town of Quincy (Braintree's old First Precinct) again chose John Adams, now a widower approaching his eighty-fifth birthday, as one of its delegates, and at the opening session in November the convention offered him its presidency, which he prudently declined. He rented lodgings in Boston in order to attend the conclave every day, but he regarded his new duty with mixed

emotions. He felt deeply honored to be chosen by his townsmen and to be offered the presidency of the convention, but he believed that the delegates' work was quite beyond his now diminished speaking capacity and was almost embarrassed to be playing any role at all. Yet Adams attended the convention's sessions at the State House quite regularly until 18 December, when he asked to be excused for "indisposition." On 27 and 28 December, at his request, two other delegates spoke for him in his absence; he probably did not return to the convention before its adjournment on 9 January 1821.[83]

In the month that he did attend sessions, however, John Adams spoke briefly several times, either to ask a question, to engage in a point under discussion, or to make a motion. Three important speeches that he delivered before his departure in mid-December concerned major provisions of his Frame of Government, and in each he stoutly defended the political convictions he had held for several decades. In a floor debate over the composition of the Governor's Council on 6 and 7 December, Adams proposed ending the selection of councilors from among the members of the Senate, in favor of their popular election in distinct districts, in order to reduce the influence of the legislature over the governor. This fear of legislative dominance of the executive had been at the center of Adams's constitutional thought since he first drafted the Massachusetts Constitution in 1779 and appeared in nearly all his writings on politics, public and private, since that date. And on 14 December 1820, in addressing the question of expanding the suffrage to include all adult males who paid any state or local taxes—roughly the suffrage that Pennsylvanians had achieved in 1776—Adams gave an impassioned defense of Massachusetts's 1780 property requirements for the electorate by calling up the specter of the French Revolution.[84]

Soon after Adams's departure from the convention to recover his health, the delegates took up Article III of the constitution's Declaration of Rights, which continued Massachusetts's colonial-era support for an established Protestant Christian church. This provision was already so controversial in 1779, and was so incompatible with John Adams's own belief in toleration, that he had delegated the drafting of the article to a colleague (probably Samuel Adams). In 1820, Adams still had the same reservations about Article III, but he did not propose its termination. Rather, in two speeches made for him by other delegates on 27 and 28 December, he advocated changing the article's concluding sentence, which read: "And every denomination of Christians, demeaning themselves peaceably, and as good subjects of the Commonwealth, shall be equally under the protection of the Law," to "All men, of all religions, demeaning themselves as good subjects, shall enjoy the equal protection of the laws."[85]

The convention of 1820–21 finally rejected all three of John Adams's positions. The Commonwealth would make no change in its selection of councilors until 1840, when the full legislature began choosing them from among the gen-

eral populace rather than from the Senate. The popular election of councilors by districts that Adams favored began only in 1855 (and continues to the present day). The expansion of the franchise to all adult male taxpayers, however, was approved immediately and promptly ratified by the people. Finally, Article III of the Declaration of Rights remained unchanged until 1833, when it was replaced by strictly admonitory support for religious observance, with no endorsement of any sect, thereby ending the last state establishment of religion in the United States.[86]

John Adams's engagement with the Massachusetts convention of 1820–21 showed how fundamentally his neighbors' behavior and beliefs had evolved since the Revolution, while his own convictions remained largely unaltered. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, like the nation as a whole, had become more religious, and to Adams's distress the political secularism of the Founding Fathers (who were now nearly all in their graves) was losing ground to evangelical enthusiasm, often accompanied by a diminished commitment to toleration. Yet the old popular trust in legislators over executives continued, and the Governor's Council remained tied to the legislature, as it had been since the colonial era. Electoral democracy, however, had made impressive gains everywhere in America, and in 1820 Massachusetts, one of the last states to restrict the franchise to property holders, finally abandoned Adams's conviction that only men who owned at least some property, whom he believed were relatively immune to the undue influence of men of great wealth, could vote responsibly. His failure to persuade his neighbors of the validity of his long-held conceptions of executive authority, voter integrity, and a broad religious tolerance is instructive of the gulf that still remained, and with respect to religion had grown even wider, between John Adams and his countrymen in his final decades.[87]

8. John Adams's Reconciliation with Republican America

John Adams's long retirement was punctuated by several events of the highest importance to the aging patriarch. Many were gratifying; others were cruelly mortifying. His son John Quincy was elected to the U.S. Senate (1803), resigned from that body under a political cloud (1808), was appointed U.S minister to Russia (1809), to the peace commission at Ghent (1814), and to his father's old post at the Court of St. James's (1815), returned to America as secretary of state (1817), and in 1825 was elected sixth president of the United States. His firstborn, daughter Abigail (Nabby), died at forty-eight at her parents' home in Quincy (1813). Abigail, his wife, dearest friend, and closest political confidant for over half a century, died in 1818, shortly after John Quincy's return to America. And between 1811 and 1814, he lost his oldest friend and neighbor, Richard Cranch, several political comrades in arms, including Elbridge Gerry, and his most treasured correspondent, Dr. Benjamin Rush. This left Adams with few close friends and correspondents, and just one son in Quincy, but over a dozen

grandchildren, including five granddaughters who lived in his home and transcribed the letters to Jefferson and others that his increasing palsy kept him from writing or copying.

But neither his gratification at John Quincy's career nor his distress and loneliness at his many losses of family and friends, nor even the rigors of advancing age, calmed his active mind or stilled his busy pen. Three themes dominated his thoughts in his last quarter century. The first was religion, a subject to which he appears to have given almost no attention from his twenties to age seventy but thereafter studied with a zeal of a searcher, without reaching any firm conclusions. The second, of course, was the nature and role of aristocracy in republican society. The third was his gradual reconciliation with a nation, and a republican political culture, from which he had become deeply estranged from the 1780s to the first years of his retirement.

John Adams's expressions of religious views during his long public career were so occasional that they have not concerned us in this study. Yet his new, broad, and consistently open-minded interest in matters of faith during his retirement seems of a piece with his continuing quest to discover the essence of aristocracy and his evident political reconciliation with his countrymen. All three were testaments of a deep desire to understand and accept the world in which he lived for so long and would soon have to leave: an understanding—and an acceptance—which had often eluded him in the contentious quarter century of his public service.[88]

The nature and role of aristocracy in America had first begun to interest Adams in the 1770s, but for several years he treated it as simply one component, although always a major component, of republican government. In the 1780s, for reasons centered more in his critical perceptions of the new nation that duty had called him to leave than of the European capitals where he served his country, his concern over aristocracy moved to the center of his political thought. There it remained during his years in federal service following his return to America. In his retirement years, when he had largely completed his substantial arguments for a powerful republican executive, the nature of aristocracy, with its promise of both good and ill, came to occupy virtually his entire thought about republican government and society. Aristocracy, particularly in its expanded new character based in large measure on new wealth, remained for John Adams the central challenge to a lasting republican future for his country.

But in the eighth decade of his life, as he worked through many old political quarrels with his country in his long correspondences with Dr. Benjamin Rush and Thomas Jefferson, and in passionate and polemical assaults on his political antagonists, both living and dead, Adams began to come to terms with the political choices of his countrymen. A turning point came in 1808, when President Jefferson's determination to confront British maritime aggression with the Embargo, the Federalist rejection of his own son for supporting that measure, and

Federalist senator James Hillhouse's radical constitutional amendments all combined to persuade John Adams of two important truths. First, America's new national parties, which he would never like, were there to stay, worked deeply into the fabric of the young republic. Second, each party possessed its vital share of the nation's positive and negative political impulses; neither had a corner on political virtue.

As Adams moved into his last decade, he came to see, in part through the continuing political success of his son, John Quincy, that America, with its national political parties, its mass democratic politics, and its growing aristocracy of wealth, had nevertheless achieved a workable—and a working—republic. He may have suspected this even earlier. In 1810 he remarked to Dr. Rush that in limiting the power and controlling the passions of aristocracy, always the principal difficulty in achieving a stable republican order, "Rome and Britain have done it best. Perhaps we shall do better than either."[89]

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CONCLUSION

Memory and Desire in America's Republican Revolution

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land, *lines 1–4*

April was never the cruelest month for John Adams, but April 1776, which saw the appearance of his *Thoughts on Government*, was a month of singular regeneration in the republican tradition. What Adams and his countrymen accomplished that spring in Congress, in their provincial legislatures, and in hundreds of county seats, cities, and towns was a remarkable revival of a political tradition that had been, for over a century, widely appealing to men of learning in western Europe, Britain, and North America, but was just as widely thought to be hopelessly visionary. In retrospect, a seasonal image is most appropriate for a revolution. Americans sometimes assume that their Revolution was the first modern revolution, which it was not, and that before the American Revolution, revolutions were rare, which they were not. The author of *A Defence of the Constitutions of the United States* knew how frequent, if often futile, serious attempts at revolutionary change were over the long course of the Western political tradition.[1]

Memory and desire were fundamental elements in every attempt at replacing a powerful monarchy, an oppressive tyranny, or a proud oligarchy with a free government, a republic that could give voice to the whole people and protect the interests of all. Without a clear memory of what had been said and done—of the successes *and* the failures—by past republicans in other lands, there could be no effective critique of present thought and action and no guidance toward a new synthesis of the competing demands of power and liberty. Without an ardent desire for change there could be no revolutionary energy, no vision of a new

political order, and no commitment to the sacrifices required to make that vision a reality. In every revolution this mixing of memory and desire, however creative and exhilarating, was—and is—often painful and disorienting. In Revolutionary America, the balance between these forces varied widely from one individual, and from one community, to another. Among America's most prominent political writers and leaders, Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexander Hamilton were three of desire's strongest—and most divergent—voices. Memory was more potent in the revolutionary visions of George Washington and James Madison. For no prominent leader of the American Revolution, however, did the past exert a more powerful attraction than it did for John Adams.

1. Memory and the Enlightenment

Adams began life in a social and political setting in which memory played an unusually powerful role. Massachusetts was the second oldest English province in British North America, and the first to develop densely populated communities, the first to establish a network of public educational institutions, from local grammar schools to the oldest English-language college in the Americas, and the first relatively populous English colony to lose its western frontier as it largely completed the settlement of its arable land. And John Adams was born and raised in one of the oldest communities in that province. His family, too, although quite undistinguished beyond Braintree's borders, was as long and well established as any in that tight community.[2]

Adams's formal education was traditional but not particularly conservative. He first attended Braintree's uninspiring grammar school, and disliked it, but he discovered a love of learning when he began private study with a more accomplished teacher. Harvard College, whose relatively long existence had generated its own social traditions that affected the values and aspirations of many young men throughout the province, in part reinforced the pull of memory in young Adams, but it just as effectively opened up his mind to the intellectual currents of the Enlightenment. In the 1750s the college was both a highly traditional educational institution and a standard-bearer of relatively liberal and contemporary intellectual values. Its theology was more Arminian than orthodox Calvinist, its psychology was Lockean, and its natural philosophy centered on Newton's laws, as explicated in current scientific observation and experimentation. The subjects that most fascinated young John Adams were mathematics and science. He was deeply moved by the observations of the stars conducted by his favorite teacher, the Hollis Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy, John Winthrop; he even partook of the not uncommon belief, among educated men, in the existence of intelligent life on other planets.[3]

But the logic of formal disputation, for which he displayed an evident talent in college, also fascinated Adams, and soon after graduating he turned his at-

tention to the law. Legal study was still in its infancy in British North America in the 1750s, and each young man entering the profession had to decide for himself whether he would seek to master only the rudiments needed for daily practice or would plumb the vast subject to its depths. Adams, eager to achieve a distinguished reputation, decided at the outset to become a learned lawyer. He immediately sought and secured the patronage of the province's most scholarly attorney and committed himself to more than a decade of intense research in two broad fields: the English common law, which every American lawyer of any ambition had to study with care, and the continental civil law, which was less essential in most daily practice and decidedly more esoteric. Each field was deeply historical, bristling with vital precedents, statutes, and legal commentary extending back more than six centuries for the common law and two millennia to the Roman origins of civil law.[4]

Because he dedicated his efforts from the outset to the study of civil as well as common law, Adams soon began to build a library that was focused more heavily on Europe's Roman and medieval past than those of most of his professional colleagues. But the implications of his studies soon carried him beyond strictly legal history. Several recognized seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authorities on international law and on universal legal principles, rapidly emerging fields in continental law, were also in some measure political writers, including Grotius, Pufendorf, Vattel, and Beccaria; a few more thoroughly political authors, notably Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, were also recognized as authorities on law in a broader sense.[5]

Most of these writers either lived or worked in republics or constitutional monarchies and were directly influenced by the republican political tradition. And John Adams read them all. As he, too, became more interested in the republican tradition, his attention was drawn to certain earlier political writers: to England's republican martyr, Algernon Sidney; to its leading commonwealth theorist, James Harrington; and, at last, to Harrington's great Florentine mentor, Niccolò Machiavelli. Nearly all of Adams's favorite authorities were vitally concerned with the early modern history of western Europe, and several studied with care the ancient Roman Republic and the earliest republics of Greece. By 1774, his own provincial veneration for New England's colonial past, so prominently displayed in his early *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* (1765), and his revered authors' memories of medieval and Renaissance England and Italy, and of ancient Rome and Greece, thoroughly dominated his reading and writing. While most American Revolutionary writers were men of the Enlightenment, and he himself was as thoroughly a child of the Enlightenment as Benjamin Franklin or Thomas Jefferson, John Adams soon became America's most historically conscious political thinker.[6]

In his legal pleadings and writings Adams frequently employed the most venerable authorities. By the 1770s his citations extended beyond the provincial

lawyer's traditional sources, the widely praised Edward Coke and the new legal sensation, William Blackstone, to include late seventeenth-century legal reports by Justice Holt, much older commentaries by Littleton and Fortescue, and works by more radical and idealistic political authors, old and new. In his long summation to the jury in the second Boston Massacre trial in 1770, he appealed both to a long revered political authority, the English republican Algernon Sidney, and to a currently fashionable legal reformer, Italy's Count Beccaria. In 1773, he marshaled an army of citations running back to the thirteenth century to prove that the independence of the judiciary was of recent vintage in England and had never been conceded by the British Crown in America.[7]

But Adams's most effective use of the past—the legal past of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland; and the republican past of England, Italy, Rome, and Greece—was in constructing the intellectual foundation for his three most original and effective political writings in the run-up to American Independence. In the winter of 1773, writing as an anonymous adviser recruited by the Massachusetts House of Representatives in its constitutional duel with Governor Thomas Hutchinson, he demonstrated that England's legal and political relationships with Wales, Scotland, and Ireland over the past six centuries proved the English monarchy had acquired dominions that, like the English colonies in North America, had not originally been subject to Parliament's authority. Wales was subsequently incorporated into the English realm, Scotland was formally united with England, and both were given seats in Parliament. Ireland was subjected to Parliament by an explicit statute. But British North America, he argued, had never been formally subjected to parliamentary authority, and therefore the colonies retained their dominion status.[8]

In the winter of 1775, in his *Letters of Novanglus*, Adams moved from the legalisms of realm versus dominion into the thoroughly republican world of Harrington, Machiavelli, Livy, and Aristotle, to argue that the governments both of Britain itself and of its American colonies were properly seen as republics, with popular rights that neither the Crown nor Parliament could abrogate. And in April 1776, in his most effective and concise political pamphlet, *Thoughts on Government*, he appealed to the authority of a long line of English republicans, from John Milton and James Harrington to Bishop Burnet and Bishop Hoadly, and to their Greek and Roman ancestors, to declare that all free governments were and must be republican. With each passing year in the escalating contest with Britain, the memory of the republican past in John Adams's writings grew more powerful and persuasive, until on the eve of American Independence it quite overwhelmed both mere logic and any appeal to popular desire as the key to the hopes, prospects, and legitimacy of the fully autonomous governments that he and his readers so keenly desired.[9]

Adams's deepening reverence for historical memory did not diminish his influence with his Revolutionary colleagues. On the contrary, it was his excep-

tional command of the republican past that made him Congress's acknowledged authority on constitutionalism in the year before Independence. In this role he resembled James Madison, who in May 1787 would enter the Philadelphia Convention with the respect and admiration of his colleagues due to his command of the federal past, the history of the various leagues and confederations, from ancient Greece to early modern Europe, that the delegates hoped would guide them in constructing a more expansive and powerful federation than any heretofore attempted. Had John Adams concluded his constitutional writings with *Thoughts on Government* in 1776 and his draft of the Massachusetts Constitution in 1779, his career both as a constitutional theorist and as a practical architect of government would have ended in an uncontested triumph, similar to that which Madison experienced after the completion of the federal Constitution in 1787 and his *Federalist* essays that fall and winter.[10]

In 1776, however, John Adams was still only half immersed in the seemingly bottomless well of memory. Over the next fifteen years, as most of his countrymen looked forward in their ardent desire to create a novel republicanism for their new nation, Adams turned back to discover what he came to regard as republicanism's timeless essence, whose knowledge alone could arm his nation's new governments to face the challenges that had ultimately destroyed every republic of the past. Beginning with his massive *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States* (1787–88), continuing in his brief but important correspondences with Roger Sherman (1789) and Samuel Adams (1790), and concluding with his "Discourses on Davila" (1790–91), Adams developed a distinctive view of republicanism that most Americans, even from his own region and identifying with the Federalist Party that supported his candidacy for the presidency, largely ignored. In retirement he restated his distinctive beliefs, most forcefully in a series of closely related letters written in response to the critique of his *Defence* in John Taylor's *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the United States* (1814), and in his long late correspondence with Thomas Jefferson. One may best comprehend the totality of John Adams's republican thought by focusing on those elements that he regarded as the irreducible essentials of any republic: the role of a powerful chief executive in the balance of executive, legislative, and judicial powers; the character and proper role of a republican aristocracy; and the relationship of a republic to the people.[11]

2. Adams's Executive and Aristocracy

An unwavering belief in the necessity of a strong executive in any free, orderly, and effective government runs through the entire course of John Adams's political thought, from his early writings in the 1760s to his last letters during his retirement. Never did he favor a weaker executive than did the majority of his countrymen, and from 1779 until his death he argued for a stronger executive than most Americans were prepared accept. But a close study of this core belief

over several decades reveals a substantial development in his conception of executive power.

Adams initially accepted the executive in all its forms—hereditary rulers in monarchies, elected rulers in republics, and appointed governors in imperial colonies—as simply a given, an institution that needed no explanation and no defense. The executive was an essential part of the traditional tripartite government taught "in the schools," as Adams's "Clarendon" expressed the matter in 1766. When royal governors and then King George III himself lost the allegiance of British North Americans in the 1770s, Adams immediately began to teach his countrymen that, in shaping their new governments, they must acknowledge and protect their newly chosen executives as integral parts of the legislative power, a lesson that he stated directly in his *Thoughts on Government* in 1776. This principle was fundamental for Adams because he conceived the legislative power in any government as the embodiment of its sovereign power; it was necessary because without it, a government's legislative houses would control and emasculate its executive. To enhance and preserve executive authority, Adams provided the governor in his 1779 draft of the Massachusetts Constitution with an absolute veto over bills passed by both legislative houses and an explicit recognition of his share in the legislative power. To the end of his life, he lamented the decision of his committee and convention colleagues to deny the governor that explicit recognition of his legislative role and to moderate his absolute veto into the suspending veto, with a supermajority override, that quickly became the norm in American constitutionalism.[12]

Despite this defeat, Adams never renounced his belief that the executive must share in the legislative power. Instead, he developed two new lines defense for the office at the center of his political system. The first, which he would advocate privately in America in the early 1790s, was the importance of extensive prerogative powers for American executives. The possession of such powers, akin to those enjoyed by Britain's monarch, was something that Adams had briefly thought, in 1775–76, was unimportant, and his countrymen heartily agreed. But as he sought to strengthen executive power in the late 1770s, he soon rejected this momentary apostasy. For John Adams, the essence of prerogative powers lay in the executive's right to appoint subordinate executive officers without legislative approval, and from the moment that he first read the federal Constitution in 1787, he strongly criticized the power it granted to the Senate to advise and consent to presidential appointments.[13]

John Adams's second major claim for the executive involved a more theoretical point, but one that was, to his way of thinking, of the first importance. On the eve of Independence, Adams, like most of his countrymen, believed in the superior stability, effectiveness, and protection of the rights of all citizens afforded by a tripartite government, with an executive, an upper legislative house, and a lower legislative house. (Only in the 1780s would Americans begin

to see their government's tripartite character embodied in its executive, legislative, and judicial branches.) But Adams, unlike the majority of his countrymen after 1776, also believed that tripartite governments, wherever they were established, simply mirrored the fundamentally eternal and indestructible tripartite societies that existed in every nation across the globe. Such a belief required two convictions: that every society has, and must always have, an aristocracy; and that the executive expressed an aspect of society that was quite real, even if it appeared to most Americans to be no more than theoretical, or even quite imaginary. In this classic view of republican architecture, the executive and the upper and lower legislative houses in any government expressed the powers and interests of the three irreducible elements of any and all societies: the One, the Few, and the Many. Adams found this essential teaching in the works of James Harrington and Niccolò Machiavelli, and from the moment that he endorsed it in his *Defense of the Constitution of the United States*, he adhered to it faithfully until his death.[14]

Of the two major concerns in John Adams's political thought, the role of the executive and of the aristocracy, the former was the first to take clear shape in his published writings (beginning in 1766), in his public rhetoric (in 1772), and in both his theoretical and practical construction of constitutions (in 1776 and 1779). His concern with executive authority was also the first to reach its full theoretical development, in his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States* (1787–88). With his correspondences with Roger Sherman in 1789 and Samuel Adams in 1790, and a few pages in "Discourses on Davila" in 1790–91, however, Adams essentially completed his contributions to the defense of executive power. Thereafter he merely repeated his established beliefs.[15]

From an early stage in the partisan struggles of the American republic in the 1790s to the persuasive academic briefs of John Howe and Gordon Wood in the 1960s, which have largely been accepted by the scholarly community without reservation, John Adams has been viewed as a major American thinker who went to Europe as an orthodox republican in 1778 and returned home a monarchist a decade later. The full course of John Adams's thought on executive power argues otherwise. Adams formulated his essential convictions on executive power well before he left America for Europe; whatever refinement he added to his argument thereafter, primarily expressed in his *Defence of the Constitutions*, was in the validation by historical example of ideas he had already expressed before crossing the Atlantic Ocean.[16]

Adams's view of executive authority, although vigorously argued and massively defended by historical proofs, never became an effective critique of America's new republican tradition as it emerged at both the state and national level in the 1780s and solidified into nearly sacred orthodoxy in the 1790s. He always hoped his distinctive republican vision would play this role; he never believed that it would. Any chance of success that it might have had, always remote,

utterly evaporated when the term *republican monarchy*, which Adams employed in both public and private writings from 1787 to 1791, entered the public consciousness firmly attached to his name. Any American who would coin, use, and defend such a term must, his countrymen concluded, be regarded as a monarchist who sought to make America's president a king for life—a fate that Abigail had predicted for John's republican vision at the very moment that volume 1 of his *Defence of the Constitutions* reached America. When Adams himself was elected president in 1796, these fears, held most fervently by his Democratic-Republican opponents, only deepened.[17]

In his inaugural address of March 1797, President John Adams declared that only the government established by the United States Constitution could command his full respect, and even his love. In occasional private letters written during his long retirement, however, he expressed continued regret that his countrymen had failed to appreciate the proper dimensions of executive power. Yet he knew that his views would never be accepted either by America's leaders or by the broader public. To that public, he would declare his full confidence in America's government, and in its office of president, with increasing sincerity as he reached his final decade. His eventual acceptance of America's unique republican path—without ever disowning his own quite different beliefs—may have been, in part, an accommodation to the declining intellectual energies of his advancing years. But it was also the result of his observation, during his long retirement, that both the nation and its executive office were surviving and even prospering. In the competitive Atlantic world of clashing empires, America was somehow holding its own, even through a second war with Britain. In North America the nation continued to expand, both geographically and demographically, to the south and west. And its political leadership, under the dominance of the Democratic Republicans who had ended John Adams's public career, was awarding the most important and honorable offices to the one American whom John Adams most admired in his final decade, his son, Secretary of State and then President John Quincy Adams.[18]

For over two centuries the origins and development of John Adams's distinctive views on aristocracy have been subject to the same general misunderstanding as his concept of executive power. But the relationship of Adams's ideas about aristocracy in this received tradition to the underlying reality of his thought is more complex, because the evolution of those ideas followed a longer, more winding path across the course of his life. Adams achieved a fully developed view of executive authority during his service in the Continental Congress; thereafter he merely implemented it in Massachusetts in 1779 and gave it a substantial historical finish in his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States* in the 1780s. His concept of aristocracy, however, did not develop smoothly over the course of his life; it changed radically in direct response to the radically changing economic and social life of his new nation.

Two realities that shaped the history of the province of Massachusetts Bay commanded John Adams's early attention to the character of executive power, while deferring any need to consider the social character of aristocracy and its role in political life. Several of the political conflicts that emerged in Massachusetts in the decades before John Adams's maturity did involve the provincial aristocracy, usually as expressed by the actions of its premier political institution, the Governor's Council, but in these conflicts the royal governor was nearly always the lead actor, standing in direct opposition to the popular assembly. As the imperial crisis deepened in the 1760s, and John Adams reached full maturity and began to prosper in his profession, royal executive authority, in the persons of Governor Francis Bernard and his lieutenant and successor, Thomas Hutchinson, became ever more obnoxious throughout the province. Yet the Governor's Council, heretofore a steady supporter of the governor, as it was—and remained—in most British North American colonies, moved into opposition in Massachusetts and supported the lower house of the legislature in its ongoing contests for political control.[19]

The Council's dramatic shift in allegiance helped to ensure that from 1766 to 1774, John Adams looked to an aristocracy that had not only welcomed him into its legal ranks but was now openly supporting the province's patriotic claims to autonomy. At both the personal and the political level, in Braintree and in Boston, most of the aristocrats in John Adams's world were friendly to new talent, and were becoming as devoted as Massachusetts's elected legislators to the interests of the entire provincial community in its fatal contest with imperial authority. Many of the province's wealthiest and most powerful men did side with Governors Bernard and Hutchinson, and finally, with General Thomas Gage; at the end, several chose exile over submission to the will of their rebellious neighbors. But many more, a clear majority of the leading families in most Massachusetts communities, including most members of the aristocratic family that Adams knew best, the Quincys of Braintree, cast their lot with the Continental Congress without hesitation. When John Adams made his dramatic final speech in Congress in favor of Independence, he had been thinking long and hard about how Americans could safely exercise and safely submit to effective executive power. But on that first day of July 1776, he had no problem with aristocracy, whether in Massachusetts or across America. In his eyes, the social, economic, and political upper classes had addressed the imperial crisis with honor and courage, and John Adams regarded himself as one of their number.[20]

In the years following Independence, John Adams's political thought began to change more radically than it had at any time since he began writing. Several of his central convictions, particularly on the origins and limits of America's political autonomy, the character and role of executive authority, and the nature and utility of a republican form of government, had evolved quite dramatically,

but in distinct stages, from 1763 to 1776. In this long decade, however, Adams's conception of the nature and importance of aristocracy had been remarkably static. So long as the social character of Massachusetts, and of America, appeared unchanged, he accepted and endorsed the aristocracy he had always known.

By early 1777, however, Adams sensed that something was seriously wrong with his new nation's upper classes. The two years of war since Lexington and Concord, bringing commercial disruption and unprecedented entrepreneurial opportunity, had created many new men of wealth and corrupted the patriotic virtue of several men of old families. In the fall and winter of 1778–79, during his first difficult year of diplomatic service in France, he was shocked to discover that an aristocratic institution he thought he knew intimately and trusted implicitly, the American Congress, had become angrily divisive, remarkably casual in the performance of its duties, and unaccountably ungrateful toward its envoys in Europe. When he returned to Massachusetts in 1779, he attempted to guard against aristocratic arrogance by creating a powerful executive for the new constitution of his home state, but was disappointed that his colleagues would not endorse the full measure of his vision. In Holland and France in the early 1780s, he again battled Congress and its haughty foreign secretary, Robert R. Livingston, the epitome of American aristocracy. By the signing of the Peace of Paris in 1783, John Adams was ready to rethink the positive view of aristocracy he had inherited from his family, his town, and his province and to ask how this aggressive sociopolitical class could fit into the new system of government that America was creating.[21]

Adams did not rush into this new intellectual challenge. The first stages of his rethinking aristocracy are hidden from view. For several years after the conclusion of the war Adams kept no diary, and his correspondence is virtually barren of any discussion of political theory. Just two remarks to Thomas Jefferson, made in 1785 and 1786, suggest what he was thinking. Initially he had in mind an extensive investigation into the political role of the nobility, of titled aristocrats, in Europe. This could easily have become a rather antiquarian endeavor. From the fall of 1786, however, as he began writing his *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*, he saw aristocracy strictly in functional terms and forthrightly defined its members as those who possessed and exercised an unusual degree of political power, whether in a monarchy or a republic—or most remarkably, in a "republican monarchy." In one important sense, however, Adams's investigation did remain somewhat antiquarian; in his *Defence* he focused most of his energies on republics that had either long expired or survived in the interior, often mountainous regions of Europe. The commercial republics that were most relevant to America and that he knew best, either through reading or by direct observation, including the "republican monarchy" of Great Britain, received remarkably little attention in his extensive treatise. His three large volumes, however, taught one clear set of lessons about aristoc-

racy: it was ubiquitous in every republic and every society that ever existed; it had threatened the stability of many republics and destroyed quite a few; and it was essential for the prosperity and the survival of any republic but particularly those that sought any kind of commercial prominence or cultural distinction.[22]

When John Adams returned to America in 1788, the focus of his political thought returned from the past to the present, from the classical republicanism of ancient and medieval Europe, dissected so exhaustively in his *Defence*, to the challenge of America's current republican experience, a challenge he had first sensed acutely in the years following Independence but had not yet been ready to address in a systematic manner. Beginning with his "Discourses on Davila" in 1790–91 and extending through his replies to John Taylor of Caroline in 1814–15, Adams gradually developed a novel theory about political aristocracy.

Building upon his basic premises in the *Defence*—that aristocracy was ubiquitous and inescapable, that it held both danger and promise for republics, and that it must be controlled by institutional mechanisms specifically designed for it—Adams constructed his theory in three broad stages. In the first, advanced in several early essays in his "Discourses on Davila" in the spring and summer of 1790, with the aid of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he traced the origins of aristocratic behavior to the universal hunger in every human being to excel over his or her neighbors and to be recognized for that superiority. A second stage, developed in an exchange of letters on natural aristocracy with Benjamin Rush and Thomas Jefferson during his retirement, was to broaden the definition of aristocracy from its traditional basis of landed wealth and family distinction common to European republics to include several assets—wealth in whatever form, rhetorical ability, a pleasing personality, and sheer physical size, strength, and attractiveness—that was especially appropriate in an American republic built on the established republican principle of representation but with an unusually broad electorate. Adams's final elaboration of his thesis, in his letters to John Taylor of Caroline, was to explore the relative importance of birth, wealth, and knowledge in establishing and maintaining an aristocracy.[23]

3. John Adams as Monarchist, Aristocrat, and Paternal Republican

Writing to William Short in 1825, Thomas Jefferson asked whether it was possible for any man to "read Mr. Adams's defence of the American Constitutions without seeing that he was a monarchist." Yet Jefferson himself, and many leading Democratic Republicans, had already reached this conclusion in the 1790s. Their conviction that Adams was a monarchist, and their fear of a reintroduction of monarchy in America two decades after Independence, was no more a paranoid fantasy than the broadly held fear of a British conspiracy against American liberties—a fear that Adams shared—in the decade prior to Independence. John Adams had labeled Great Britain a republican monarchy in his *Defence of the*

Constitutions of the United States in 1787. As vice president, he had favored the adoption of a quasi-monarchical title for America's chief executive by the Senate in 1789. And Jefferson, when he stated his conviction that Adams was a monarchist, had probably never heard a report of his old friend and rival's private statement to Roger Sherman, also in 1789, that the government of the United States itself should properly be regarded as a republican monarchy.[24]

Moreover, in 1789 a majority of the Senate favored an elevated title for the President. George Washington himself, a good republican who had no wish to be declared a king, and whose fondest desire from the early 1790s until his retirement was to return to Mt. Vernon as soon as possible, initially believed that annexing a grand title to his office would be appropriate and beneficial. He changed his mind when he learned how cool several of his Virginia supporters were to the idea. But his behavior in office—his austere conduct at his formal levees, his coach and four (and sometimes six), his remote and even intimidating demeanor, and his participation in the annual celebration of his birthday as a formal public event—closely resembled that of the British monarch. The major difference between "George I" of America and George III of Great Britain, aside from the vastly dissimilar scale of their residences and official retinues, was Washington's evident superiority, not only in his intellect but in the very dignity that set off monarchs from their subjects. And even those Democratic Republicans who knew Washington well and respected his republican convictions could not help noticing how avidly Federalist leaders participated in and defended the grand style of the new nation's "Republican Court."[25]

Part of America's difficulty with monarchy and republicanism in the 1790s was the evolving, interpenetrated character of the two forms of government. For several decades before Independence, monarchy had been substantially republicanized, not only in British North America but in Great Britain and even in France. Although there were few republics of any size, wealth, or power in eighteenth-century Europe, the absolute monarchies that dominated the continent were in danger of becoming glaring anachronisms in the age of the Enlightenment. In Britain, where the power of the king was formally limited by the nation's constitutional arrangements of 1688–89, and in France, where the formally absolute king had to deal respectfully with many liberal and enlightened ministers, local officials, and prominent legal and political thinkers, it was becoming common for many loyal subjects to espouse their republican principles. This could mean anything from an admiration for the Roman Republic to an ardent embrace of Enlightenment political thought. Both in Europe and in North America, however, these same subjects seldom wished to live in a republic without a king. They believed that such republics must be small and weak, as nearly all the republics they saw around them were.[26]

In his "Letters of Novanglus" (1775) and *Thoughts on Government* (1776), John Adams was one of the first British North Americans to reject this belief

and assert that Americans could create and live in a strong republic. But Adams never saw monarchies and republics as simple, diametrically opposed forms of government. In his *Defence of the Constitutions* (1787), he recognized a wide variety of republics. Many years earlier, in his unpublished oration at Braintree (1772), he recognized three kinds of monarchy, of which two shared certain features with republics. Independence was a watershed in the political thought of most Americans, but this was less true for John Adams than for many of his countrymen. They believed that they lived in a monarchy before July 1776, and in a republic thereafter. For Adams, things were not so simple.[27]

John Adams's largest goals, from his first public writings in 1763 to his final correspondence in the 1820s, were to defend the liberties and achievements of the individuals and communities he knew in the province, state, and nation in which he lived, to protect their freedom of thought and action, and to promote the enlightened benefits of broadly available public education. A free government that would guarantee these liberties was, by common agreement, the only good government, and Adams flatly declared in 1776 that "there is no good government but what is Republican." The difficulty, however, was that republics were notoriously unstable, forever oscillating between aristocracy and democracy, or, even worse, between the extreme forms of those states: oligarchy and chaos. The solution to this problem, Adams believed, was to acknowledge forthrightly that the political needs of every society could only be addressed effectively by distributing power as evenly as possible among the three entities that had always sought to exercise it: the One, the Few, and the Many. In this triad, the Few (the aristocracy) were potentially the most dangerous. To control them, the Many (the people) must have the assistance of a powerful One, a strong executive whom no aristocracy could bully or overpower, and who could also defend the entire society against any outside threat. Such a One was, in John Adams's view, a republican monarch.[28]

But what kind of monarch was this? Adams gave an early answer in his draft for an oration to his townsmen in 1772. On that occasion he defined three types of monarchy. In the first, "the whole Legislative and Executive Power is in the Breast of one Man." In the second, "the supreme Power is not in a single Person, but in the Laws, the Administration being committed solely to the Prince." The third type was "a limited Monarchy, where the Nobles or the Commons or both have a Check upon all the Acts of Legislation of the Prince." In 1772 it was this third type of monarch that most interested both John Adams and his fellow townsmen, but the second type, in which the chief executive was perceived as merely administering the laws, which embodied "the supreme Power," held considerable fascination for him. It was always crucial for the extensive powers of John Adams's executive to be limited by other institutions, whether Britain's Lords and Commons or America's councils, senates, and assemblies, but he envisioned his executive as having a special role as guardian of the laws,

which expressed any republic's—and any constitutional monarchy's—sovereign power. This was in keeping with his conviction that the principal internal danger to the stability of any republic would first arise among the ambitious Few, to which the relatively disadvantaged Many would respond with anger and resentment, at which point only the One, with all his prerogative powers and his right to veto any legislation, could effectively intervene to protect established laws and restore order and justice.[29]

It is clear that John Adams had higher expectations for his executive than he did for either the Few or the Many. To meet those expectations, that executive needed all the power he could safely exercise without becoming a tyrant. This helps to explain two features of the concept of the executive that Adams advocated to Roger Sherman in 1789. The first was his insistence that America's president needed more power than the federal Constitution had granted. But even with less power than he really needed, Adams believed, the president was a true republican monarch. Although the position of America's chief executive was neither inheritable nor held for life, so long as he held that position, his power was nearly as extensive and absolute, within the limits that Americans had set in their Constitution, as the power of the king of Great Britain, within the limits prescribed by the British constitution. Adams, for his part, saw no danger in the American president acquiring yet more power, but even without any augmentation, he was a monarch for four years. In an irony that John Adams may have privately appreciated, the perfect embodiment of republican monarchy was not President John Adams, who in his difficult single term in office never projected the full authority that such an executive should have, but the object of his envy, President George Washington.[30]

In John Adams's world, the essential foundation of an effective republican executive, whether that executive was an elected president or a king born to rule in a constitutional monarchy, was power, specifically the power needed to tame his nation's aristocracy. The essential foundation of aristocracy, whether that aristocracy was incorporated in elected councils or senates, or in heritable seats in a House of Lords, was again power, the power needed to dominate the common people and defend its wealth and privileges against executive encroachment. Whether a man was a president or a king, a senator, duke, or earl, he had reached his position, and he maintained it, by his power to command either the positive vote or the tacit assent of many other men, and was in danger of losing his position whenever that public support waned. Because John Adams was not simply a political theorist but an officeholder across nearly four decades as a town selectman, provincial legislator, member of Congress, diplomat, vice president, and second president of the United States, the question naturally arises: Was John Adams an aristocrat?

Under the rules of aristocracy that Adams himself propounded, the answer must be affirmative. Although he was relatively poor in several of the aristo-

cratic assets that he identified—his family was of quite modest distinction, he was never wealthy, and his physical appearance was far from imposing—he possessed the intelligence, legal knowledge, and rhetorical skills need to impress enough other men to command the votes—popular, legislative, congressional, and Electoral College votes—that he needed to advance his public career. Under the more traditional idea of aristocracy that had prevailed in British North America before the Revolution, John Adams would not have qualified for this status much beyond the confines of his native Braintree, and only there, in part, through his education and profession. But the Revolution changed all that, and soon made real his expanded idea of aristocracy.

In light of his political thought, however, the most interesting question is not whether John Adams was an aristocrat, or even whether he was widely regarded as an aristocrat (as he was by many Democratic Republicans who professed to hate aristocrats), but whether he regarded himself as an aristocrat. This is not a question that admits of a simple answer. Few Americans in the era of the American Revolution, regardless of their relative wealth and family distinction, would publicly, or even privately, admit that they were aristocrats. A notable exception, Gouverneur Morris of New York, was as remarkable for his arrogance—he referred in a letter in 1775 to the common people as "reptiles"—as he was for his rarity. Several other Revolutionary leaders who were aristocrats if the term ever had any meaning in America, men such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Robert R. Livingston, would all have qualified under an older definition of aristocracy, based squarely on family distinction and landed wealth, even if in Britain their fortunes would have placed them only in the country gentry. All these men—James Madison the least—behaved as aristocrats in their dress, manners, and personal style.[31]

John Adams was rather different from these worthies, both before Independence and in the federal era. He was too professional and too bourgeois to strike an aristocratic pose, and on his occasional attempts to do so, when he strapped a ceremonial sword to his portly waist for public show, he cut a less than imposing figure. But like politics, all aristocracy is initially local; the matter of scale can powerfully affect not only how a man is seen but how he sees himself. In considering the origins of John Adams's thought, one must pay respect to his inner judgment. On the basis of both his public and private writings, that quiet judgment can only be that John Adams indeed regarded himself as an aristocrat, not in the 1750s when he was an aspiring youth of a good but modest family, nor quite in the 1760s when he was steadily moving up in legal and intellectual circles, but by the 1770s when he became an indispensable figure both in Massachusetts politics and in the Continental Congress. Thereafter, as an American minister plenipotentiary in Europe, as America's first vice president, and as second president of the United States, his own sense of his elevated standing needed no defense.

Yet one aspect of John Adams's concept of aristocracy did not fit Adams himself well. What he feared in aristocracy was not family distinction, an impressive appearance, or intellectual and rhetorical abilities, but wealth, and particularly the desire to obtain yet more wealth. Adams had little interest in wealth for himself or his family, and he scorned the desire for wealth in others, even as he acknowledged it to be a natural expression of man's fundamentally aggressive, self-regarding nature that he described so effectively in his "Discourses on Davila." Adams's own aggressive drive to achieve the distinction that all men craved was directed toward fame, not wealth. In this one important dimension of aristocracy, Adams was never an aristocrat, and he composed virtually all of his writings about aristocracy in a heightened sense of fear of the corrupting power of wealth.

In 1863, just a century after John Adams published his first political essays, another American, as tall and lean as Adams was short and stout, declared that the nation's central goal must be to ensure that its "government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth." John Adams dedicated his life to establish an American republic "of the people and for the people," but he never fully accepted the idea of government "by the people," and he never tried to hide his dissent. Several of his contemporaries seized on both his reservations about popular rule and his respect for republican monarchy to deny that he was a republican at all. One of his harshest critics was James Madison, who had formed a low opinion of Adams even before *A Defence of the Constitutions* appeared. So hostile was Madison toward Adams by 1791 that he could write to Thomas Jefferson: "Under a mock defence of the Republican Constitutions of this Country, he attacked them with all the force he possessed, and this in a book with his name on it whilst he was the Representative of his Country at a foreign Court."[32]

This arresting characterization of a work written explicitly to defend the structure of the classical tripartite republic as it was expressed in most American state constitutions and in many European republics casts some doubt on how thoroughly Madison had read the *Defence*. But it underscores the fact that *republic*, *republican*, and *republicanism* were terms that nearly every American revered after July 1776, but which they interpreted in a variety of ways. John Adams was as sincere a republican as Thomas Jefferson or James Madison. Unlike them and many other Americans, however, he explicitly qualified the democratic component in his republic. He had, moreover, fewer illusions about American politics and society than many of his contemporaries. Unlike Jefferson, he never flattered the common citizen or imagined that America's future would be as an agrarian yeoman republic. Unlike the nominally democratic Madison, however, he also never believed: "The protection of [the diversity of] faculties [of men from which the rights of property originate] is the first object of government." Adams was an old-style classical republican who came of age intellectu-

ally in the 1760s and early 1770s, just before the advent of liberal America. As an American minister plenipotentiary with successive portfolios in France, Holland, and Britain for nearly a decade, he missed the intellectual revolution that transformed American republican thought in the 1780s. Sitting in the American legation on Grosvenor Square in London, he resolved to defend the classical republic when most of his countrymen were moving on to a different republican vision.[33]

It is a commonplace among most historians and political scientists, no matter how highly they regard John Adams, to label him as a conservative (and, sometimes, as a "conservative revolutionary" or a "revolutionary conservative"). And indeed he was a conservative, at least from 1779 to the end of his life, under almost any definition of that word. Yet there is an evident desire among many scholars who greatly admire Adams (of whom the present writer is decidedly one) to portray him as a more democratic thinker than he was. Perhaps this temptation owes to the democratic dogma that is so nearly universal in modern American culture. But a clear-sighted view of John Adams, while it reveals a staunch republican and a firm defender of political liberty, does not reveal a democrat.[34]

John Adams was always convinced that democracy, as a pure form of government, was utterly unworkable, unstable, and prone to descend into chaos, soon to be followed by either oligarchy or tyranny. As a component of his tripartite republican government, however, the people had a vital role to play in electing their representatives, serving on juries, and manning the militia. Moreover, Adams always believed that free, orderly government was essentially made for the benefit of the people, not simply the people as the total population of any society (the whole people), but the people as the Many, the most vulnerable inhabitants of that society.

Given these convictions, the ideal role for an official who sat in authority over the people in John Adams's world, whether as a legislator, a judge, or, especially, as a governor or as president, was essentially paternal. This may explain his fascination with the second of three kinds of monarchy that he defined for his Braintree neighbors when he addressed them in 1772, in which "the supreme Power is not in a single Person, but in the Laws, the Administration being committed solely to the Prince." Whether the executive was seen as this guardian of the laws or, as in a true republic, an integral player in a tripartite legislature, he was the one indispensable ally and protector of the people against the aristocracy. From this perspective, there was never any need for either an American state governor or the president to be a man of the people, and it was better that he not be. The executive's only assets that the ambitious aristocrats who would fill Adams's senates would respect were superior power and authority. Any man who aspired to be an executive would need every mark of distinction that set him off from both the common people and as many aristocrats as possible,

whether by his wealth, his family, his education, his individual talents, or his personal style and appearance, to command that authority. In John Adams's republican world, the friend and protector of the people could not be simply one of the people.[35]

4. The Origins of Adams's Republican Vision

John Adams was what might be called "an original," an individual who appears to resemble no other person of his time and place. One can easily exaggerate this characterization. In his day-to-day behavior, Adams was fairly representative of his birthplace, his century, and his social class. As a courtroom lawyer and as a public official, he was more aggressive than many of his contemporaries—largely to the benefit of his clients and his constituents—but, again, he was hardly exceptional. Certain features of his personality that several of his colleagues found trying and occasionally even offensive, particularly his vanity and irascibility, were hardly uncommon. And the public policies that he pursued as a legislator, congressman, diplomat, and federal executive were generally sound and in the mainstream of public opinion.

In just one area, as a political thinker, John Adams was indeed an original. He openly espoused certain political beliefs—in the need for a more powerful executive, in the inevitability of aristocracy, and in a relatively subordinate role for the mass of the people—that were common enough among American Loyalists and British Tories, and were undoubtedly cherished in secret by several High Federalists, but were rarely uttered or put to paper by supporters of the Revolution. But Adams, unlike every Loyalist and Tory, and many Federalists, was a genuine American Revolutionary and sturdy American nationalist until the day of his death. Yet whatever value one may place on John Adams's political thought, it was glaringly anomalous in post-Revolutionary America. How can one explain Adams's unorthodox beliefs? His own cousin, Samuel Adams, found him incomprehensible by 1790. Many other Americans, even of a similar social and geographic background, like Roger Sherman, were equally dismayed. There is a distinct possibility that the genesis of John Adams's thought will always remain a mystery, the ultimate motivation for his singularity just out of reach.

The foregoing study, however, has proceeded under the opposite assumption, that Adams's political ideas arose out of certain features of his birth family and community, to be shaped by his profession and the culture of his native province, and given their final form by the course of his public career in America and Europe. The place to begin is the farm of Deacon John Adams and his wife, Susana Boylston, a short walk from the center of the First Parish of Braintree, Massachusetts.

Because Deacon John Adams was a farmer in the summer, made shoes in the winter, and never owned more than two hundred acres of land, historians

have routinely placed our John Adams's birth family squarely in British North America's vast rural middle class. Our John Adams, in this view, was a self-made man who rose from obscurity to prominence in the law, and then to political fame. And in his twenties, Adams did lament his modest lot. Condemned to hard labor in his legal studies, without assistance from any quarter, he feared that he would forever remain in obscurity. But this is not all that John Adams was, or thought he was. His father was a fourth-generation resident of Braintree, a third-generation town selectman, and a church deacon. In that tight community, the Adamses looked up to just one family, the Quincys, whose faithful supporters they were. John Adams's mother, from nearby Brookline, belonged to one of the most prominent families of that town, and at some point well into his career, when John decided it was time to acquire a family coat of arms, he looked up and appropriated the crest of his Boylston relatives. In short, John Adams's family background was not obscure; within his small community, it was quite prominent.[36]

It was the First Parish of Braintree (later Quincy), Massachusetts, however, that played the central role in forming John Adams's view of society. Of the most prominent members of America's Revolutionary generation, Adams was one of the least mobile in his youth and early adulthood, and the most deeply rooted in one community. Three members of the celebrated Virginia dynasty, Washington, Jefferson, and Madison, also lived most of their lives in one location within that province, and always on family land, but either their parents or a sibling had first moved to each of these places from elsewhere in Virginia. Many notable Revolutionaries, particularly in the middle colonies, were far more mobile: Franklin moved from Boston to Philadelphia; Hamilton from the West Indies to New York; and James Wilson from Scotland to Pennsylvania. The Adamses, however, had remained in a single town, rarely ever residing more than a mile from its center, for the entire century between immigrant Henry Adams's arrival in North America and the birth of his great-grandson.

John chose to begin his legal career in Braintree, and as he became successful, he chose to commute to Boston for several years rather than leave his birthplace. Although he did live for two brief periods in Boston, he always kept a residence in Braintree, continually increased his land holdings there, and settled his family there, in the house where he was born, during his long years of service in Philadelphia, Paris, and Amsterdam. Resisting his wife's entreaties to purchase land, even for investment, in any other town or state, he bought a somewhat larger home in Braintree (Quincy after 1792) on his return from Europe in 1788. There he spent every vacation he took while in federal service, and there he retired and closed out his life, just one mile from his birthplace. For John Adams, Braintree was a microcosm of society in which not only he, but also his simply educated farmer father, could be a local aristocrat. Perhaps more important, it supplied young John Adams with a vision of a harmonious world shaped

by long traditions, a world in which the past always counted much more than the present.[37]

Braintree itself, however, could not offer an ambitious young man that distinction in the law, and later that fame in public service, that John Adams craved. It had too few people and too little money. Just ten miles to the north was the densely packed port town of Boston, the provincial capital, which had plenty of both. To move from Braintree to Boston was to enter a more complex and competitive world, but one that had its own tradition of order. The requirements for entering on a legal career in the capital were not rigid, but attending Harvard College and then reading law with an established attorney was the surest path to success, and the path that Adams took. It was at this point, after reading law in Worcester and returning to Braintree, that Adams made an unusual decision, to begin a lengthy study of Justinian's Code in order to master the civil law of continental Europe. He may have done this in part to facilitate taking another step up the professional ladder by securing the endorsement of a senior attorney. But he began this study before his interview with Jeremiah Gridley, Massachusetts's most learned lawyer, and he pursued it long after Gridley's death. When Adams first appeared before the Suffolk County court in Boston at age twenty-three, with Gridley at his side vouching for the young man's learning and fitness for legal practice, he had already embraced two pillars of the local aristocratic system: a commitment to scholarship, with the intention to display it in his practice; and the patronage of a professional superior.[38]

The province of Massachusetts Bay, one of the oldest and most densely settled colonies in British North America, with its established churches and its relatively low rate of immigration from any quarter for a century before the Revolution, was also one of the most orderly and pacific. It had a sizable aristocracy of local families, loosely connected by its several county courts and four province-wide institutions: Harvard College, which many of its members had attended; the House of Representatives, where several members served as leaders; and the Superior Court and Governor's Council, both of which it dominated. As a rising Harvard-educated young barrister, first in Braintree and from 1768 in Boston, and briefly as a legislator, John Adams was closely connected with most of these institutions; he came to know intimately many local leaders, several key assemblymen, all the Superior Court judges, and several members of the Council. Two features of this aristocracy were crucial in shaping the character of Adams's political thought. First, several of its leaders were quick to honor him and by 1770 virtually all acknowledged him as the leading member of the Massachusetts bar. Second, the majority of Massachusetts's aristocrats supported the American Revolution at every stage, from the Stamp Act to Independence. In May 1774, when the imperial crisis began in earnest, John Adams was firmly embedded in a provincial aristocracy that he knew intimately and deeply respected.[39]

The American Revolution could have disrupted that society and shattered its aristocracy, but it did neither, at least not at first. Until Independence, the unfolding imperial crisis strongly endorsed the values of the people of Massachusetts, their political and social leaders, and their fundamental political institutions: their town governments and county courts; their town militias, with their select corps of minutemen; their assembly; and even their patriotic Governor's Council. Only the predominantly Loyalist Superior Court had to be largely reconstituted; only the last royal governors were effectively rendered powerless. And Adams himself moved up, to the Continental Congress, where he achieved the only unqualified success—as committeeman, orator, and war administrator—of his national career. John Adams's lifelong commitment to a strong executive would appear to have come from his reading in law and history, despite his deep hostility toward the last royal governors of Massachusetts. But his commitment to aristocracy, of which his image was overwhelmingly positive before Independence, was firmly rooted in the one aristocracy he knew, and which he had recently joined.[40]

Adams's gradual disillusionment with the aristocracies he knew, in Massachusetts and throughout America, began shortly after Independence, as the trials and temptations of war bred unwelcome changes in the character of many of America's economic and political leaders. The targets of his disillusionment grew to include Congress itself during Adams's trying diplomatic assignments in Europe, culminating in perhaps the greatest frustrations of his career, and the most strained relationships with his masters in Philadelphia and his colleagues in Paris, in concluding peace with Britain in 1782–83. By this date, the fundamental ingredients of Adams's political thought were in place. They would first come together as a coherent world view in his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States* in 1786–87, but Adams would continue to develop and shape his new line of thought, with particular attention to aristocracy, during his first years in federal office, and then, after a long hiatus, in retirement.[41]

From the mid-1780s to the end of his long life, John Adams's historical memory, as a writer, outran his revolutionary desires. He still had keen ambitions, both for himself and for America. For his own reputation and personal gratification, he sought high political office at every opportunity until his final defeat in 1800. He pursued his larger goal, enduring fame as a constitutional father of his country, even more avidly. He also hoped for honorable careers for his three sons and was handsomely rewarded when he witnessed his eldest, John Quincy, succeed to the presidential chair a quarter century after his own involuntary retirement. His public desires were for America's peace, order, and prosperity in the near term, and for the future, a global eminence in enlightened political leadership, the widespread education of its citizenry, and a growing cultural sophistication, without undue luxury, that would eventually rival the glory of any European nation.[42]

But the greater part of what John Adams wrote after 1786, in both public print and private letters, looked back, not to a golden age—Adams did not believe that such an epoch had ever existed—but to a broad spectrum of republican experience over some two millennia. It was there, he was convinced, that America and every nation must search to discover how to improve its government and society. This was a central message of his *Defence of the Constitutions*. Whether he began that work primarily out of a concern over current political developments in France, in Holland, or in Massachusetts—events in each location in 1786 have had their advocates as the prime motivators of the *Defence*—he believed that every state and nation could learn the deepest political lessons only by looking to the republics and republican thought of the past. This is exactly what the French *philosophes* had not done, as they built their politically centralized castles in the air. In his "Discourses on Davila" (1790–91), he spoke more directly to the French nation and invoked its civil and religious wars to show the folly of ignoring the lessons of its own dark past. Every one of Adams's explorations of memory, up to and including his rich correspondences with Benjamin Rush, Thomas Jefferson, and John Taylor of Caroline in the last two decades of his life, was directed toward determining how Americans, and all peoples, could achieve a more orderly, enlightened, and pacific republican future.

Yet the images and metaphors in much of John Adams's most effective literary work suggest that partially hidden behind his strategy of looking backward in order to move forward was a certain sense of loss. From 1768, when he first moved from Braintree to Boston, and over the next decade, as the imperial crisis forever changed the world in which he grew to maturity, he had been initially enticed, and then compelled, to abandon the small-town, provincial community that he loved so deeply. As a partly self-governing polity within a larger more nearly sovereign province, which was itself part of an immense fully sovereign empire, the town of Braintree had, for John Adams, one perfect political participant, his father. Deacon John Adams was his son's ideal constituent, respected enough to be a quasi aristocrat within his small community, but sufficiently obscure in the province of Massachusetts to be the kind of common man who needed the protection of "a government of laws, and not of men"—as Adams expressed it in his draft of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780—against the powerful ambitions of royal governors and their favorite supporters, and the might of the distant monarch and royal ministers who ran the British Empire. Throughout his public career he visited that small community for as long and often as he could, and in 1801 he returned there to finish out his days. But the idyllic world of provincial Massachusetts, a world whose pre-republican virtues John Adams remembered so fondly, was gone forever. The state and nation that succeeded it had less time, and far less inclination, to look to the past than did John Adams.[43]

5. A Summary Statement of the Development of John Adams's Political Thought

This study began with the goal of defining John Adams's distinctive conceptions of executive authority and aristocracy, and of determining the time, place, and circumstances of their development. To achieve these objectives, the author has been drawn to investigate several related topics and, at last, to attempt a full account of the unfolding of Adams's republic in its American and European settings over the course of half a century. It may now be helpful to return to this work's original questions and give a concise answer to each.[44]

First, John Adams's resistance to rethinking the role of the republican executive in accordance with the new currents in political thought generated by the American Revolution did not arise from his experience at European royal courts in the 1780s (as charged by a few Democratic Republicans in the 1790s and by Mercy Otis Warren in 1805, and believed by several historians in the twentieth century), but from his deep satisfaction with the pre-Revolutionary form of government in Massachusetts, despite his dislike of its last royal governors; and from his preponderantly premodern reading in British and European law, history, and political thought, most notably the work of James Harrington, before he first sailed to Europe in 1778.

Second, Adams's increasingly distinctive concept of aristocracy arose not from any direct contact he may have had with aristocracies in Europe but from his direct observation of America's new aristocracy of wealth in the late 1770s, and again after his return to America in 1788; from his new perspective on American aristocracy, including the American Congress, gained from his European vantage point from 1778 through 1783; and from the mere fact that, by residing in Europe from 1778 to 1788, he quite missed the revolution in American political thought following Independence. It is probable, however, that had John Adams never gone to Europe, his extensive reading in older republican authors and in British and European law before Independence would have made him less receptive to the new developments in American political thought after that event. One must add that the widespread popular perception that Adams liked and admired aristocracy, a perception shared by some historians and political scientists, is far more false than true. Adams did believe that many aristocrats, and on occasion entire aristocracies, had been virtuous contributors to the public safety and welfare, and that in a well-regulated republic more aristocrats could be encouraged to play this role. More important in his view, however, were those ambitious, avaricious aristocrats whose power must be carefully harnessed and strictly controlled by any republic that did not wish to be ruined by their aggressive behavior.[45]

The author would also like to answer one important question posed to him at an early stage in the writing of this work by a most respected colleague: If

John Adams's political ideas were so anomalous in the decades following Independence, why did Americans continue to support his public career for another quarter century? Three causes appear likely. First, before the late 1780s few Americans, if any, noticed that Adams's political ideas were becoming distinctive and even anomalous. Second, his admirable public character, his exceptional competence and capacity for hard work, and his generally mainstream and moderately commercially oriented public policies remained appealing throughout New England and in large parts of the Middle Atlantic states into the 1790s. Finally, several perceptive critics, a few from New York and New Jersey, and more in Virginia, did begin to reject both Adams and his political ideas as early as the late 1780s, and with increasing force in the 1790s, but it took more than a decade for this criticism, combined with a growing dissatisfaction with certain domestic policies passed by the Federalist Congress and executed by President John Adams during his administration, to effect the rejection of his leadership in 1800.[46]

6. What's in a Name? Aristocracy Then and Now

Much of the specific content of John Adams's political thought after 1780 has always been unacceptable to his countrymen, but there is ample evidence that many could not even get past the terms of analysis he employed to see what lay behind them. From the outset, *monarchy*, *aristocracy*, and *aristocrat* were the most troubling of all the labels he used, and aristocracy was perhaps even more disturbing to Americans, over a longer period of time, than monarchy. Adams declared repeatedly that he did not believe "aristocrats" were morally better than the common people, but he complicated his argument by stating that he also did not believe them to be fundamentally any worse. He did believe that there would always be some men who would have more influence than the common people in every society; this enhanced influence was his core definition of aristocratic power. And he attributed this influence not only to artificial and even quite superficial advantages that certain men enjoyed, but to the natural advantage, enjoyed by some of these same men, and by certain others, of possessing a high level of innate ability. As he made particularly clear in his late letters to John Taylor of Caroline, but less often in print, he did not equate natural abilities with moral superiority; his aristocrats, like all men everywhere, came in good and bad varieties. But the fatal resonance of the term aristocracy frustrated all his attempts to explain his views. Post-Revolutionary Americans simply could not shed their belief that aristocrats, everywhere they might be found, would always arrogantly claim to be—or at least secretly believe themselves to be—better than other men: not merely wealthier and better educated than the common people, but "wellborn," of "the better sort," innately possessed of both superior abilities and superior morals.

In opposing America's deep prejudice against aristocracy in the 1780s and 1790s, John Adams was taking on two powerful adversaries. The more obvious was that vast body of common people, from Maine to Georgia, and from every coastal city to the raw frontier, who viewed all "aristocrats" as formally recognized economic and political elites who were still oppressing the common people in Europe, as they had so often done in America before the Revolution. The great majority of Americans could not tolerate the thought that some men with special advantages in life might attempt to frustrate their economic opportunities and deny their civic equality. For this large audience, Adams's concept of aristocracy raised only the specter of fresh oppression.[47]

John Adams's second large group of adversaries comprised the thousands of grander and lesser aristocrats who did in fact exist, and most often thrived, in every state in post-Revolutionary America. Adams, much as he feared their power, never begrudged their existence, which to him was always, and must always be, "natural," in all its historically based variety, with all its rational and irrational, fundamental and superficial attributes. But those aristocrats, whether of the grander variety in coastal Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania, and in tidewater Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina, or of lesser varieties found in every other state and community, were increasingly becoming too prudent to admit their superiority to other Americans, and looked askance at any one of their members who was foolhardy enough to advertise it.

After 1787 the only American aristocrats foolish enough to call particular attention to their existence were certain outspoken High Federalists, and the troublesome "Party of One" who so came to despise them, John Adams. Other Federalists and virtually all Democratic Republicans would have none of this: not the New York grandee, Robert R. Livingston; not John Adams's most imposing trifecta aristocrat, George Washington (a beneficiary of inherited wealth, wealth by marriage, and innate ability); and certainly not those "democratic" pillars of the Virginia slavocracy, James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. And John Adams, it should be noted, almost never made the invidious distinctions among aristocrats that many New England Federalists hurled at Virginia's Democratic Republicans as slave owners, or that many Democratic Republicans hurled at Federalists as merchants and bankers. He believed that America would have a much brighter future with fewer slaves and fewer banks, but every source of wealth, like every other material asset, was a legitimate pillar of aristocracy, if a less admirable one than the innate ability that Thomas Jefferson placed at the core of his natural aristocracy.[48]

If post-Revolutionary Americans could not see the aristocracy in front of their noses and deeply resented any appeal to call it by its historic name, what is the likelihood that twenty-first-century Americans might ever understand John Adams? We now live far on the other side of "Jacksonian democracy," and of the

more valid democracy of Abraham Lincoln, one of the purest "natural aristocrats" to reach the pinnacle of American public life. If George Washington could claim, with good reason, to be a sound republican, and if Thomas Jefferson could boldly seize the democratic banner—and fool some two centuries of American historians and laymen alike into designating him their standard-bearer—how much easier is it for America's current billionaires, even in the midst of the most blatant interference by some of their number in the democratic process, to claim that they are just ordinary Americans who happen to have more money than most?

Yet in making his argument, did John Adams have at hand any effective alternative to the language that he employed? The term *elite* had not yet appeared, and if it had, would it have been any more appealing to post-Revolutionary Americans than aristocrat? Could Adams have made his fundamental argument about aristocracy without using historical labels? Would his countrymen have found that argument more appealing if he had simply pointed out the threat to republican stability posed by wealthy men, and then proposed that they—like his "aristocrats"—be informally concentrated, under the watchful eye of more humble legislators on the one side, and powerful executives on the other, in state legislative upper houses, and in the United States Senate? To do so, he would have had to give up much of his appeal to history, to "memory," and it is impossible to imagine John Adams making this personal sacrifice. Had he done so, political theory would have lost much of that essential romance that he so enjoyed. And perhaps, in the end, it would not have mattered. For one essential truth about the great majority of Americans, in 1787 and in 2016, appears to be their conviction that wealth itself did not and does not pose any threat to their nation's happiness. To concede the validity of that threat, to admit that Americans were never morally exceptional and possessed no exemption from the broader corrupting power of wealth in human affairs, would be to question the value of their own avid pursuit of that precious good.

7. Adams's Legacy to Democratic America

No historian has an absolute obligation to relate the subject of his or her inquiry to the present day, and many a fine work has avoided the temptation to make explicit connections between the events of the past and the concerns of the present. But this historian is also a citizen of the republic that John Adams labored so mightily to establish, and in his work as a teacher, author, and editor over five decades, he has always believed in the relevance of the American Revolution to the needs and issues of his own day. So it seems appropriate to attempt a brief consideration of the ways in which the shape and content of John Adams's republic might relate to the world in which the readers of this work now live, be they Americans by birth or by choice, or citizens of any nation who have an interest in what America is, or might become.

First, one may dispose of the speculation: "What would John Adams think about American government, or politics, or society, or—fill in the blank—if he were alive today?" This question, particularly when asked of a noted American political figure, is too often a prelude to announcing that the man or woman in question would deeply sympathize with a present day liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican, or even more precisely, a Christian, a secular humanist, a feminist, an environmentalist, an internationalist, or an isolationist—in short, whatever variety of American the writer who poses the question happens to favor. Important elements in John Adams's thought and character might draw him to any of these identifications; other elements could repel him from an unqualified endorsement of each of them.

A more direct approach would simply assert Adams's probable opinion of the character of national public life in the twenty-first century. This could be a rather facile exercise, but still with some explanatory value. The deepening dysfunction of our Congress, the ever louder, cruder, and more hostile noise of our political discourse, and the increasing polarization of our political parties would surely merit the scorn of America's nonpartisan second president. Yet however dismayed John Adams might be at the sight of our unseemly democracy, he would not be astonished by it. In his voluminous writings he examined a broad range of political behavior, from the relatively civilized to the openly violent, and was always convinced of the potential of every country, including the United States of America, to descend to the latter condition. The current economic state of our nation, with the ever increasing power of its corporations devoted to an arrogant avoidance of taxes and regulations and a thorough corruption of the political process, all feeding an increasingly uneven distribution of wealth, would surprise Adams even less. Many of the operational conditions of our unhappy economy, notably the growth of government regulation in response to growing corporate power, and the growth of corporate lobbying to defeat that regulation, are post-eighteenth-century developments. But the rise of an unchecked aristocracy of wealth was exactly what Adams predicted.

John Adams, like any serious public thinker in our nation's past, can be an insightful commentator on many of the problems that confront us today—as he dearly wanted to be—but only if we focus clearly on what he wrote or said and connect it directly to the public issues we see before us. From this perspective, Adams appears both relevant and irrelevant to twenty-first century America (just as Gordon Wood perceived him as being to post-Revolutionary America). The irrelevance is obvious; while in federal office, Adams wrote privately that America would probably not survive as a republic unless it altered its Constitution to strengthen the president and weaken the Senate. This prediction has thus far proved to be quite false. The limited veto power granted the president, which Adams thought too weak a tool to be effective, has been a potent weapon in the hands of all but the most incompetent of our chief executives. The Senate's

power to reject executive nominations, particularly when yoked to threats of filibusters, has recently proved more challenging to the exercise of executive power, but it is as yet unclear whether this is the late appearance of a fundamental constitutional weakness that Adams feared or a more temporary aberration in the workings of our national government. On balance, the American presidency has in fact grown more powerful, especially over the past century, but this has happened primarily as a result of wars and other international challenges, without any formal augmentation of the Constitution's provisions for executive power.

Two of Adams's other predictions have fared little better. He feared the Senate would become so powerful that it would dominate the government and destroy all vestiges of republican balance. To remedy this, he wanted the upper house to be explicitly regarded—and closely watched—as an aristocratic body and denied any role in the executive's appointment powers. For much of the past two centuries, the Senate has been a gathering of the wealthy, and it has often exerted considerable power, but it has never dominated both the House of Representatives and the president at the same time, and has seldom dominated either for long. As for John Adams's fear that allowing men without property to vote and hold office would undermine the republic, this belief soon became more quaint that erroneous. The American electorate started expanding dramatically as soon as the Revolution began. It embraced nearly all white males by the 1830s, and nearly all whites of either gender by the 1930s. Following the civil rights reforms of the 1960s, the electorate is now quite broadly inclusive, at least on paper. To this day there are Americans who lament this inclusiveness, and before every election many of them, on various pretexts, engage in egregious maneuvers to exclude voters whom they dislike or fear, but few even bother to attempt an intellectually honest defense of their position.

So what did John Adams get right, and how relevant are his most valid lessons for contemporary America? One of Adams's greatest virtues was his ability to see American society clearly, warts and all, and to express candidly what he saw. To this he added, at several points in his career, an almost clairvoyant power of prediction. Both strengths played a role in the conclusions he reached about aristocracy and society in America, conclusions that he was eager to convey to his countrymen and leave for their descendants. First, of course, was his teaching that aristocracies existed in every society and played a role in every political system, whether they were entrenched within existing governments or challenged them from outside. Their power for good or ill, in or out of office, was even greater in republics than in monarchies, and they were as prevalent in post-Revolutionary America as they were in old Europe.

From the late 1770s, however, Adams began to recognize that aristocracy in post-Revolutionary America was different from anything seen before Independence. His first expressions of this understanding were brief and fragmentary, but in 1790, in his "Discourses on Davila," he began to explore the psychological

basis of all aristocratic behavior. After 1791, first out of a prudent regard for his high federal office, and then due to a period of depression following his forced retirement from public life, he ceased all consideration of this subject for nearly two decades. But in 1807 he resumed writing about aristocracy, and over the next decade, in private correspondence and unpublished essays (at least one of which he tried to publish), he plumbed the depths of this new American phenomenon.[49]

In his late correspondences with Dr. Benjamin Rush and Thomas Jefferson, his review of Senator James Hillhouse's proposed amendments to the Constitution, and his series of letters to John Taylor of Caroline, Adams finally developed a coherent portrait of American aristocracy and explained its capacity to undermine the republic. He began by dismissing all titles and honors as irrelevant to the definition of an aristocracy. Adams was not opposed to public honors for citizens of a republic in recognition for outstanding public service; indeed, he thought such recognition generated a crucial support for any republic. But formal honors were not what made an aristocracy. A key ingredient of aristocracy was wealth, the economic power to command the behavior of less wealthy men, whether they held public office or were simply common citizens. In addition to wealth, however, men could acquire aristocratic power through the public distinction of their family (by birth or marriage), a superior education, a pleasing personality, an ability to speak well in public, a capacity for military command, or indeed simply by possessing a greater height or a more handsome visage than the average citizen.

All these advantages conferred aristocratic status because the essential goal of any aristocracy was political power. In the workings of a republic, this power was exercised to sway voters to support particular candidates and to persuade legislators to support particular policies. As Adams expressed it, the essence of aristocracy for any citizen was his power to command at least one other vote beside his own; the degree of his power was an expression of the number of votes, popular or legislative, that he could command. Because both the exercise of this power and its highly uneven distribution among men were ubiquitous and inevitable, republics must develop policies to harness a substantial share of that aristocratic power for good—by dispensing honors and awarding public offices for meritorious service—and to control the remainder of aristocratic power that would do harm. Republican America could most effectively achieve this by placing each state's aristocrats in its upper legislative house and its grander national aristocrats in the U.S. Senate. Securely contained within those bodies, where they would be watched over on one side by lower legislative houses (from which the most powerful aristocrats would, Adams hoped, be largely excluded), and on the other side by strong governors and presidents, they would be encouraged to work for their own distinction as individual citizens, and for the distinction of their chamber, and would be prevented from harming the other branches of the government.

It is problematical in the extreme to project how well John Adams's republican theory might ever have worked in practice. His hopes to elevate the presidency and curtail the power of the Senate by amending the Constitution were never realized, although the nation has long rewarded meritorious service with honors and high office. The Senate, from its opening session in 1789, has commonly been regarded as a club of eminent, wealthy men (and, recently, several distinguished women). And both the House of Representatives and the president have often exercised their power to check that body. To determine whether these actions, over some two centuries, have more closely followed the model of government carefully worked out by James Madison and his colleagues at Philadelphia or have played out a script that is closer to John Adams's vision would inevitably call forth the recitation of many facts, and the exercise of many judgments, over which citizens of the best intentions would disagree.

What can be said, however, is that most American voters and officeholders during John Adams's lifetime, and for several decades after his death, could not easily have imagined they were following his political plan because so much of that plan was largely unknown to anyone outside his family until at least the mid-nineteenth century.[50] The present study has argued that Adams's republican vision is not well understood to this day. But one must acknowledge that with regard to both the workings of government and the ideal character of the American citizen, John Adams's political views staked out, at best, a minority position. The national government was firmly Madisonian, relying for its stability on connecting its several branches of differing character, in a complex fashion, to a multitude of competing interests, at least until the eve of the Civil War, when this intricate system appeared likely to fail. The nation's ideal citizen in these early decades of the republic was firmly Jeffersonian and then Jacksonian, a geographically mobile agrarian yeoman following an aggressive economic ethos. The political vision of John Adams, which both arose out of and favored orderly, relatively densely settled communities that supported public education and long-established religious denominations in preference to the Democratic Republicans' more expansive, individualistic, and evangelical national character, had increasing difficulty maintaining its dominance even in New England and met little acceptance to the south and west.

The federal union survived the Civil War only by becoming less federal and more national—a development that the James Madison at the Philadelphia Convention would have approved—and by jettisoning the archaic institution of slavery that neither Madison nor Jefferson could bring himself to reject. In the century following the election of Abraham Lincoln, the nation changed dramatically. Its economic base moved from agriculture to industry, and from individual to corporate leadership. Its local communities became more densely populated, and its frontier disappeared. By the twentieth century, Thomas Jefferson's yeoman farmer had become as anachronistic as John Adams's propertied elec-

torate. Economic growth now depended, as never before, on extensive public education. Americans, particularly in the South and West, were still more prone to fantasies of rugged individualism and evangelical enthusiasm than their European ancestors—and their European contemporaries—but the reality of their daily life had become more urban and technological, thereby setting up the need for a more communitarian ethos. By the mid-twentieth century, America, it would appear, had become a better fit for John Adams's vision of government and society.

But has the economic and political life of our nation, now so far removed from the lost world of Thomas Jefferson, really become more hospitable to John Adams's vision, or only to that of Alexander Hamilton? The aristocracy of which Adams warned his countrymen was not simply one of great landowners and great slaveholders, much as he disliked both. It was the aristocracy of wealth itself, and of the power of wealth to unbalance the American system, that he so deeply feared. In arguing that the American electorate should be based on the possession of property in order to ensure that each voter would retain his independence, Adams hoped that property would remain widely distributed. But the ownership of productive land in America, and of every form of liquid capital, was already becoming more concentrated well before the Civil War. This uneven distribution of wealth waxed and waned over the century following that conflict, but it has only grown more pronounced over the past several decades. In the political and economic world of America, if not in its broad culture, Hamilton has firmly triumphed over Jefferson.[51]

Neither Jefferson's fate nor Adams's should be surprising. Of the four major Founding Fathers who are most commonly identified with articulate plans for America's future, John Adams offered his countrymen the most disinterested and even self-denying benefits. Jefferson held out to the common citizen the deepest sense of personal freedom from the constraints of community and religion. Madison offered a political system that was forthrightly designed to protect wealthy Americans from the excesses of democracy. Hamilton offered the greatest rewards to economic enterprise, for both established and rising fortunes. John Adams promised none of this. He did not believe that it was the business of government either to flatter its citizens or to make them wealthy. He did think that government, as the only institutional embodiment of the whole community, had a responsibility to protect its citizens' fortunes from the depredations of other citizens. But, unlike Madison, he envisioned that protection as extending particularly to those of more modest means, because they were most in need of protection.

So what did John Adams offer his countrymen? A decade before Independence, Adams expressed his vision of political felicity in the following terms: "What a fine reflection and consolation it is for a man to reflect that he can be subjected to no laws, which he does not make himself, or constitute some of his friends to make for him: his father, brother, neighbour, friend, a man of his own

rank, nearly of his own education, fortune, habits, passions, prejudices, one whose life and fortune and liberty are to be affected like those of his constituents, by the laws he shall consent to for himself and them."[52]

Because John Adams's view of politics and society was relatively nondevelopmental (although it could accommodate steady development quite well), his essential goals were not efficiency or growth, but peace and harmony. His ideal citizen took pleasure in belonging to a republic that functioned well in the here and now, that was committed to treating different socioeconomic classes fairly, and that avoided grandiose fantasies about the future. This essential stance, in which each citizen looked first to his ancestors—both biological and political—for guidance, and then to his countrymen on either side of him for support and validation, before expending vital energies in looking forward, was not designed to appeal to an aspiring young nation that was pushing rapidly across a vast continent. Jefferson spoke more persuasively to the common farmers who were settling the nation's frontier and the industrious artisans who were building up its rapidly growing cities. Madison reassured the more affluent everywhere that their wealth would be secure. And Hamilton encouraged the most entrepreneurial elements in society, in return for their support of a strong central government with an aggressive national agenda. As the nation has grown larger, richer, and more powerful, it can be no surprise that Hamilton has irreversibly gained the upper hand over Jefferson, while Madison has retained the affection of those seeking an almost architectural balance of national interests.

This enduring pattern appears unlikely to change in the near future, despite serious economic, social, and even ecological challenges to the nation. If America does change its essential approach to the uncomfortable realities that confront it, John Adams's republican vision, never widely popular or well understood by his countrymen, is unlikely to play an explicit role in that transformation. Yet this writer can imagine an unexpected contemporary relevance for John Adams's republic. Our densely settled, highly technological nation is forever beyond the agrarian nostrums of Thomas Jefferson. James Madison's commitment to protecting the economic status quo yields no large answers to current problems. And Alexander Hamilton's devotion to unbridled capitalism and aggressive nationalism seems brilliantly designed to compound nearly every one of America's current problems.

What all three Founders missed was the danger, and indeed the existence (which they and virtually all of their countrymen denied), of republican aristocracy. John Adams, clairvoyant in many things, could not foresee the particular financial and corporate forms that America's new aristocracy would take. But he did see that aristocracy coming in its basic form: grasping wealthy men who would employ any means to political power in order to aggrandize their fortunes, whether it be a distinguished family lineage, impressive, obfuscating rhetoric, sheer physical attraction, or wealth itself, liberally applied.

In John Adams's republic, the only remedies for this malicious stew were eternal vigilance against aristocratic power—which is just as important for the health of a republic as Thomas Jefferson's eternal vigilance against every form of religious or intellectual tyranny—and a commitment to the welfare of the entire community, with particular attention to its weakest members.[53] In his vision, America could still become a large nation, and Adams strongly supported its territorial expansion until his death. It could also become quite wealthy, and he expected that it would. His fondest hope for the nation, however, was that it would become eminent in science and literature, and in every noble art. But John Adams's America would do all these fine things as a harmonious alliance of strong communities, not as a mere aggregation of self-centered individuals. It would direct the inevitable aspirations of its most enterprising citizens toward honorable service to the nation, formally recognized by public rewards. And in one of his favorite themes, it would inculcate these republican values through a system of education for the entire population. He placed this obligation, in rather awkward but impassioned phrasing, at the close of his greatest intellectual and moral achievement, his *Report of a Constitution for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts*:

> Wisdom and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people, being necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties; and as these depend in spreading . . . education . . . among the different orders of the people, it shall be the duty of legislators and magistrates, in all future periods of this Commonwealth, to cherish the interests of literature and the sciences, and all seminaries of them; . . . [and] to countenance and inculcate the principles of humanity and general benevolence, public and private charity, industry and frugality, honesty and punctuality in their dealings, sincerity, good humour, and all social affections, and generous sentiments among the people.[54]

8. Two Valedictions

The present work has traced John Adams's clear-eyed vision of flawed human nature, and the resulting necessity of strong government to control that nature, from his 1763 essay, "All Men would be Tyrants if they could," to his last reflections on the problems of natural aristocracy in his letters to John Taylor of Caroline in 1815. But in this long account, two contrasting aspects of John Adams's personality have seldom appeared, despite the fact that its author has always found them among his hero's most attractive qualities. He employed each in turn in two poignant summaries of his career. In 1785, during an unexpected lull in his arduous decade of diplomacy, he struck a tone of philosophic acceptance of the disappointments of public office in a letter to an old college friend:

> It is a Consolation to me under all discouragements, to reflect upon services, which I have now and then had Opportunities of rendering. But such Occasions rarely occur: public Life is like a long Journey, in which we have immense Tracks of waste Countries to pass through, for a very few grand and beautiful Prospects.[55]

The other often neglected side of John Adams's protean intelligence can be even more appealing. After Benjamin Franklin, Adams had probably the best sense of humor of all the Founding Fathers. Writing to his dear friend Dr. Benjamin Rush in 1811, he mixed the serious and the comic in marrying the age of early modern revolutions with his own career:

> Have I not been employed in mischief all my days? Did not the American Revolution produce the French Revolution? And did not the French Revolution produce all the calamities and desolations to the human race and the whole globe ever since? I meant well, however.[56]

NOTES

Abbreviations and Notations

AA	Abigail Adams (1744–1817)
Adams-Jefferson Letters	*The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, ed. Lester J. Cappon (Chapel Hill, NC, 1959), 2 vols.
Adams Papers	The Adams Papers Manuscript Trust Collection, 1639–1889, Massachusetts Historical Society; items cited by author, recipient, and date
Adams Papers, Microfilms	Adams Papers Collection, 1639–1889, microfilm edition, 608 reels, Massachusetts Historical Society, 1954–59; items cited by author, recipient, date, and reel number
AFC	*Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. L. H. Butterfield, Marc Friedlaender, Richard Alan Ryerson, Margaret A. Hogan, Sarah Martin, et al., 12 vols. to date, to 1798 (Cambridge, MA, 1963–)
ANB	*American National Biography*, ed. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, 24 vols. (New York and Oxford, 1999)
D&A	*Diary & Autobiography of John Adams*, ed. L. H. Butterfield et al., 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1961)
DNB	*Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, 21 vols. (Oxford, 1917)
JA	John Adams (1735–1826)
JA, *Legal Papers*	*Legal Papers of John Adams* [1758–77], ed. L. Kinvin Wroth and Hiller B. Zobel, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1965)
JA, *Works*	*The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: with a Life of the Author*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, 10 vols. (Boston, 1851–56)
JCC	*Journals of the Continental Congress*
JQA	John Quincy Adams (1767–1848)
LbC	Letter Book Copy (in a manuscript collection)
MHS	Massachusetts Historical Society
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. G. C. Matthew and Brian Harrison, 60 vols. (Oxford, 2004)
OED	*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., 20 vols. (Oxford, 1989)
PBF	*The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree, William B. Wilcox, Claude A. Lopez, Barbara B. Oberg, Ellen R. Cohn, et al., 41 vols. to date, to 1784 (New Haven, CT, 1959–)
PGW	*Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series*, ed. Dorothy Twohig et al., 18 vols. to date, to 1795 (Charlottesville, VA, 1987–)

PJA	*Papers of John Adams*, ed. Robert J. Taylor, Gregg L. Lint, et al., 18 vols. to date, to 1787 (Cambridge, MA, 1977–)
PJM	*Papers of James Madison* [Congressional Series, 1751–99], ed. William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal, 17 vols. (Chicago, and Charlottesville, VA, 1962–91)
PTJ	*The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd, Charles T. Cullen, John Catanzariti, Barbara B. Oberg, et al., 41 vols. to date, to 1803 (Princeton, NJ, 1950–)
PTJ, Retirement Series	*The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney et al., 11 vols. to date, to 1817 (Princeton, NJ, 2004–)
Sibley-Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*	John L. Sibley and Clifford K. Shipton, eds., *Biographical Sketches of Those Who Attended Harvard College*, 18 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1873–1999)

Introduction. The Evolution of a Distinctive Republican Vision

Epigraph: JA, *Works*, 6:429.

1. Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1969), chap. 14. For my use of *the whole people*, see sect. 3 in this introduction, and chap. 4, n. 5; chap. 6, n. 77; chap. 8, sect. 4; and chap. 9, sect. 1, and n. 26.

2. The only published critique was by "A New Jersey Farmer" [John Stevens], *Observations on Government, Including Some Animadversions on Mr. Adams' Defence of the Constitutions* (New York, 1787), quoted in Wood, *Creation of the Republic*, 583–84.

3. The definitive discussion of this process of democratization is Wood, *Creation of the Republic*. See also Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), chap. 5.

4. See Richard D. Brown, *Revolutionary Politics in Massachusetts: The Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Towns, 1772–1774* (Cambridge, MA, 1970); and chaps. 3–5.

5. For detailed explorations of the local democratization of politics on the eve of the Revolution, see Richard Alan Ryerson, *The Revolution Is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765–1776* (Philadelphia, 1978); Steven Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class: The Philadelphia Militia and the "Lower Sort" during the American Revolution* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1987); and Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760–1790* (Baltimore, 1981).

6. See Wood, *Creation of the Republic*, 242–55, 369–70, 385, 438, 445–46, 448, and 597, on the rapidly evolving views of the Senate in several states, particularly in Maryland.

7. *James Madison: Writings*, ed. Jack N. Rakove (New York, 1999), 161 (*The Federalist*, No. 10).

8. *PJA*, 1:167, "Clarendon to Pym," 27 Jan. 1766; see chap. 1, sect. 5.

9. *PJA*, 2:314, *Letters of Novanglus*, letter VII, 6 Mar. 1775; see chap. 4, sect. 3.

10. See chap. 8, sect. 4, and chap. 10, sect. 6.

11. The strongest scholarly argument for this view is John Howe's *The Changing Political Thought of John Adams* (Princeton, NJ, 1966), esp. chap. 3. Early expressions of this conviction appeared in an upstate New York newspaper essay in 1791 (see chap. 9, sect. 4), and in Mercy Otis Warren's *Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* (1805) (see chap. 10, sect. 3). On this point, Gordon Wood, in *Creation of the Republic*, chap. 14, closely follows Howe.

12. *Letters of Novanglus*, letter VII (*PJA*, 2:310).

13. *Defence of the Constitutions*, vol. 1, letter XX (JA, *Works*, 4:358–60); JA to Sherman, 18 July 1789, JA, *Works*, 6:429. No British monarch had vetoed a bill passed by Parliament since 1709, and by the mid-eighteenth century British rulers relied entirely on more informal methods of preventing legislation they disliked, but JA quite ignored this, and perhaps did not fully appreciate Britain's more recent constitutional development.

14. JA to Jefferson, 6 Dec. 1787, *PTJ*, 12:396.

15. On one occasion, in letter XXIX in volume 1 of his *Defence of the Constitutions*, JA did estimate that in America those below the aristocracy held nine-tenths of the landed property (JA, *Works*, 4:434; quoted in chap. 8, sect. 4).

16. JA to Benjamin Rush, 8 Jan. 1812, in *The Spur of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush, 1805–1813*, ed. John A. Schutz and Douglass Adair (San Marino, CA, 1966), 223; Wood, *Creation of the Republic*, chap. 14.

17. I say "through all the stresses and challenges from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century," rather than "into the twenty-first century," because there is now a considerable body of thought, among both political scientists and economists, that the current plutocratic corruption of American politics, and particularly of Congress, which began to gain real momentum in the 1970s, may have reached a point where the Madisonian constitutional mechanisms of 1787 can no longer contain it. I will refer to this development, whose malevolent force I take quite seriously, in the conclusion, specifically as it relates to JA's political thought.

Chapter I. A Provincial Reverence for the British Constitution, 1735–1767

Epigraph: PJA, 1:167; the essay first appeared in the *Boston Gazette*, 27 Jan. 1766.

1. Most leaders of the Revolution were born between the 1720s (e.g., Samuel Adams) and the 1740s (Thomas Jefferson); George Washington (1732), John Dickinson (1732), and JA (1735) were at the center of this cohort. All these men reached maturity before the Stamp Act, and if we assume a full life span of seventy years—generous for the eighteenth century, although not for America's Revolutionary leaders—both Adamses, Washington, and Dickinson all reached the expected midpoint of their lives by or before 1770. See Richard Alan Ryerson, ed., *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic* (Boston, 2001), 7–8; and Pauline Maier, *The Old Revolutionaries: Political Lives in the Age of Samuel Adams* (New York, 1980), chap. 6, esp. p. 270.

2. See William S. Pattee, *A History of Old Braintree and Quincy, with a Sketch of Randolph and Holbrook* (Quincy, MA, 1878), 1–63, 599–600, and 622–29, on early settlement, land grants and purchases in Braintree, agriculture and industry (early nineteenth century), and the 1792 assessment of all real property in Quincy (formerly Braintree's North Parish). For a comparative view of Braintree's population, socioeconomic conditions, and political structure in the broad context of Massachusetts towns, see Edward M. Cook Jr., *The Fathers of the Towns: Leadership and Community Structure in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Baltimore, 1976). Braintree grew more prominent and prosperous through the eighteenth century, and with nearly 2,500 inhabitants in 1765, spread over nearly fifty square miles (embracing nearly all the land in four modern towns and one city), it was one of the most populous and extensive towns south of Boston. In the third quarter of the century, its more densely settled North Parish (later the town and then city of Quincy), where JA's family lived, began to acquire the first characteristics of a Boston suburb, already visible in Cambridge, Roxbury, Brookline, Dorchester, and Milton: a few established residents who fairly regularly commuted into the city on business (as JA did in the 1760s and 1770s), and a few Boston residents who

purchased second homes in the neighboring countryside (Cook, *Fathers of the Towns*, 65n, 71, 160, 163).

3. See Andrew N. Adams, *A Genealogical History of Henry Adams, of Braintree, Mass., and His Descendants* (Rutland, VT, 1898). JA's Boylston relatives included the Boston merchants Nicholas and Thomas, and Dr. Zabdiel Boylston (1680–1766), a pioneer in smallpox inoculation. Samuel Adams Sr., father of Boston's Patriot leader, was the son of yet another John Adams who was a brother to Joseph Adams, the father of Deacon John Adams. This earlier John Adams had moved from Braintree to Boston in 1687. Thus the Patriot Samuel Adams and JA were second cousins. The only families of a distinctly superior social rank to the Adamses in Braintree were the far wealthier and provincially prominent Quincys, their North Parish neighbors, and the more locally prominent Thayers in the Middle Parish to the south.

4. *D&A*, 3:257–59; *Harvard University Quinquennial Catalogue of Officers and Graduates, 1636–1925* (Cambridge, MA, 1925), 160–61.

5. Samuel Eliot Morison, *Three Centuries of Harvard* (Cambridge, MA, 1936), chap. 5; *D&A*, 3:258–63; *Quinquennial Catalogue*, 7, 22. On Joseph Marsh, see Sibley-Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, 8:448–49.

6. The College was probably even stronger in the 1760s and early 1770s—the peak of its colonial enrollment—when it finally abandoned the practice of entrusting a single tutor to teach most subjects to each entering class and began assigning each faculty member to teach courses in his own area of special knowledge (Morison, *Three Centuries*, 57–59, 82–90).

7. The biographer was Clifford K. Shipton, the twentieth-century author of vols. 4–17 of Sibley-Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*; the sketches of JA and his classmates of 1755 are in vol. 13. See also *D&A*, 3:260–62, and Shipton, "Ye Mystery of Ye Ages Solved, or How Placing Worked at Colonial Harvard & Yale," *Harvard Alumni Bulletin*, Dec. 1954, 258–59, 262–63.

8. Shipton, "Mystery of Ye Ages Solved"; Sibley-Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, 18:202. Harvard routinely reordered its student rankings once or twice before graduation, primarily to reflect infractions of college discipline, but only the first ranking, based on family status alone, is considered here.

9. Sibley-Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, 13:512 (the ranked list), and 513–686 (the sketches).

10. Sibley-Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, vol. 13. Also see JA to John Quincy Adams, 26 May 1786, on Harvard students and their future careers (*AFC*, 7:205–6). Probably in response to JA's suggestion in this letter, JQA entered sketches of all fifty classmates in his diary (JQA, *Diary*, 2:82, 95, 97, 162–98, 210–42).

11. Sibley-Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, vol. 13.

12. *D&A*, 3:260, 262; *The Earliest Diary of John Adams*, ed. L. H. Butterfield (Cambridge, MA, 1966), 44–46, 48, 55, 60–64. See the discussion of JA's third "Clarendon" letter, below in this chapter, for the role of natural philosophy in JA's political vision.

13. *D&A*, 3:262; Sibley-Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, 10:341–48 (Lemuel Briant).

14. *D&A*, 3:262–63.

15. *D&A*, 3:263.

16. *D&A*, 3:263.

17. *PJA*, 1:17; *D&A*, 3:264. At midcentury, for the first time in the college's history, a significant number of Harvard students began to choose law as a profession. See Conrad Edick Wright, *Revolutionary Generation: Harvard Men and the Consequences of Independence* (Amherst, MA, 2005), 229 (table 6).

18. *D&A*, 3:264–66.

19. *D&A*, 1:35; 3:264. On JA's long fascination with Bolingbroke, see Zoltan Haraszti, *John Adams & the Prophets of Progress* (Cambridge, MA, 1952), chap. 4. Bolingbroke was also a deist, and JA would later read and comment critically on several of Bolingbroke's philosophical essays. But there is no evidence that he read Bolingbroke's philosophical works before the Revolution, although they were also published, in a multivolume edition separate from his political and historical works, in 1754.

20. *D&A*, 3:264.

21. See Haraszti, *Prophets of Progress*, 49–54.

22. Sibley-Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, 13:515; Morison, *Three Centuries*, 90–91. From 1740 until the Revolution, at least 80 percent, and often over 90 percent of Harvard graduates took their A.M. degree, usually within three years of their graduation (*Quinquennial Catalogue*, 155–68).

23. *PJA*, 1:25 (quotation); *D&A*, 1:44; 3:269–70 (quotation).

24. *D&A*, 3:270.

25. *D&A*, 1:44–45; 3:270–73.

26. *D&A*, 1:44–45, 54–55; 3:271–72. JA's meeting with Gridley occurred on 25 October 1758. Works by Jean Jacques Burlamaqui, Johann Gottlieb Heineccius, and George Turnbull, as well as by Hugo Grotius and Samuel Pufendorf, are still in JA's library in the Boston Public Library. And see Daniel R. Coquillette, "Justinian in Braintree: John Adams, Civilian Learning, and Legal Elitism, 1758–1775," in Coquillette, ed., *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, vol. 62, *Law in Colonial Massachusetts, 1630–1800* (Boston, 1984), 359–418.

27. *D&A*, 1:58–59 (6? Nov. 1758); 3:273. Van Muyden's *Compendiosa* is still in JA's library at the Boston Public Library, which has a full list of the volumes that JA purchased from Gridley's estate.

28. The months October through December 1758 are thoroughly covered in JA's diary (*D&A*, 1:44–66), and in various materials in his *Earliest Diary* (53–54, 55–60, 64–80), as well as in his autobiography (*D&A*, 3:269–74). His diary is quite full for the next three years, but after 1761 it is less complete and even fragmentary, although unevenly, until 1774, when it again becomes much more detailed. His autobiography, too, is less detailed for the mid- to late 1760s but becomes much fuller in the 1770s.

29. See *D&A*, 1:44–45 (on Gridley and Prat); and *D&A*, 1:58–59, 224–25, and 3:270, 273, 276, for JA's admissions to court in 1758, 1761, and 1762. In August 1762, when Chief Justice Thomas Hutchinson formally instituted the title of barrister, the Superior Court recognized about two dozen barristers in Massachusetts, of whom about two-thirds practiced primarily in Boston or in surrounding Middlesex and Suffolk counties. See Charles R. McKirdy, "Massachusetts Lawyers on the Eve of the American Revolution: The State of the Profession," in Coquillette, *Law in Colonial Massachusetts*, 313–58. JA comments on his travels while riding circuit in *D&A*, 1:227, 258–59, 354–60; and 3:281–82, 289, 307.

30. JA's friend, Massachusetts attorney general Jonathan Sewall, at the request of Governor Bernard, tried to persuade JA to accept a Crown appointment as advocate general in the Court of Admiralty sometime in 1768 (*D&A*, 3:287–89; and chap. 2). The Massachusetts House of Representatives asked JA to help it draft its two replies to Governor Hutchinson in 1773, even though he was not a member of the House (*PJA*, 1:309–46; and chap. 3).

31. In June 1760, JA noted his satisfaction in acquiring three new clients, all from Braintree's Middle Parish, where he and his family were less well known and less favored than in the North Parish (*D&A*, 1:135). The following spring he recorded Colonel Josiah Quincy's talk of JA becoming "in 2 or 3 years" one of the province's

most celebrated attorneys. JA dismissed this as flattery, but it does suggest that early in his practice he was attracting the attention of important people (*D&A*, 1:209–10).

32. *D&A*, 1:167–68; and see *PJA*, 1:45–46. The two politically prominent figures who complained publicly that they had been promised the post of chief justice by a previous governor, despite their relative lack of formal legal credentials, were James Otis Sr., a self-taught lawyer, lower court judge, former attorney general, current speaker of the provincial House of Representatives, and father of the brilliant lawyer and Revolutionary orator, James Otis Jr. (see *D&A*, 3:275), and Gen. William Brattle, another lower court judge, with whom JA would debate the issue of judicial tenure and independence in Britain and America in 1773 (see chap. 3).

33. Sibley-Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, 6:561–63; McKirdy, "Massachusetts Lawyers," 329–32.

34. The texts of JA's essays on taverns are in *D&A*, 1:128–29, 190–92, 204–6, and 212–15. Henry Adams the immigrant, his son Joseph, and his grandson Joseph, JA's grandfather, were all brewers or maltsters in Braintree, and Henry's grandson John, John's son Samuel Adams Sr., and Samuel Adams Jr., the Patriot, were all brewers or maltsters in Boston (Adams, *Genealogical History*; Sibley-Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, 10:420). On 18 May 1761, the town of Braintree voted not to issue any more licenses to sell "spirituous Liquors" and to limit the town to just three innkeepers, one in each parish. But JA's campaign had no lasting effect either in Braintree or elsewhere in Massachusetts, as he later admitted (JA to Benjamin Rush, 28 Aug. 1811, cited in *D&A*, 1:130n).

35. *D&A*, 1:129.

36. See especially "Vices of the Political System of the United States," Apr. 1787, *PJM*, 9:348–57.

37. JA provides a more detailed account of this corrupting process in his third unpublished essay on taverns, written in March 1762 (*D&A*, 1:205–6).

38. See *D&A*, 3:276–77; *PJA*, 1:33–38 (Deacon John Adams's will, dated 8 Jan. 1760), and 51–53 (the estate inventory, dated 9 Oct. 1761); and *D&A*, 1:225, 229–30. By his will and testament, Deacon Adams did leave less land to JA than he did to JA's younger brothers, but the difference was not great. According to the estate inventory, which valued most but not all land parcels mentioned in the Deacon's will, JA received a house and 40 acres of land, including a pasture and an orchard, fresh and salt meadow, and two woodlots, in five parcels, valued at about £340, all in Braintree's more heavily settled and developed North Parish. Second son Peter Boylston Adams received about 67 acres of farmland in five parcels, worth probably over £450, also in the North Parish; and youngest son Elihu Adams received about 95 acres of farmland, valued at about £410, located mostly in Braintree's most rural, least developed South Parish (now Randolph, Mass.). It is also worth noting that in his will Deacon Adams, who was primarily a farmer in the summer and a cordwainer in the winter, called himself a "Gentleman" (*PJA*, 1:33), perhaps on the strength of his long tenure in church, militia, and town offices. His inventoried estate, which omitted one parcel of land mentioned in his will, was valued at £1,330, including 188 acres of land valued at over £1200.

39. *D&A*, 1:203 (Braintree's roads); *PJA*, 1:54–57 (the South Commons); and *D&A*, 1:216–17, and 3:277–78 (Peter Boylston Adams).

40. *D&A*, 1:55 (Gridley's advice); 1:209–10 (Colonel Quincy's flattery); 1:66–69, 72, 74, 87, 88, 103–4, 113–15 (JA's courtship of Hannah Quincy); and 1:113, 209–10 (JA's dislike of Colonel Quincy). Three major branches of the Quincy family lived in Braintree in the 1760s. Edmund Quincy had two daughters: Esther, whom JA noted in his diary, but did not court, and who would soon marry his friend, Jonathan Sewall; and Dorothy,

who would later marry John Hancock. Edmund's younger brother, Colonel Josiah Quincy, had two sons, Edmund (Ned) and Samuel, who were contemporaries and friends of JA, and a younger son, Josiah Jr., who would join JA in defending the British soldiers in the Boston Massacre trials in 1770, in addition to his daughter, Hannah. The aged John Quincy, a cousin of Edmund and Josiah and head of a third branch of the family, was the grandfather of Abigail Smith, whom JA would marry in 1764. See *D&A*, 4:index; and *AFC*, 2:index.

41. *D&A*, 1:71, 108–9; *AFC*, 1:1. JA's addendum to Richard Cranch's 30 December 1761 letter to Abigail's older sister, Mary Smith, is the earliest surviving record of his interest in Abigail. He first noted Abigail and her sister Mary in his diary in the summer of 1759 (*D&A*, 1:108–9).

42. JA's political essays of 1763 are a piece entitled "To all young gent[lemen] between [10?] and [20?]" (or perhaps "[20] and [30]"), entered in his diary in February (*D&A*, 1:242–43, 245n); his first and second "Humphrey Ploughjogger" essays of 14 March (with a dateline of 3 March) and 20 June 1763, in the *Boston Evening-Post* (*PJA*, 1:61–62, 63–66); three "U" essays of 18 July, 1 August, and 29 August, in the *Boston Gazette* (*PJA*, 1:66–81); his unpublished essay headed "All Men would be Tyrants if they could," post 29 August 1763 (*PJA*, 1:81–83); his last "U" essay of 5 September 1763, in the *Boston Gazette* (*PJA*, 1:84–89); and his last "Humphrey Ploughjogger" essay, also of 5 September 1763, in the *Boston Evening-Post* (*PJA*, 1:90–94). JA's incomplete and unsent letter to Jonathan Sewall, written sometime in the spring of 1763 (*PJA*, 1:62–63), is closely related to his unpublished essay of February, to his first two "Humphrey Ploughjogger" essays, and to his long "U" essay of 29 August.

43. See especially the character of Squire Western in Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749). Texts of Franklin's "Silence Dogood" letters (1722) and his annual "Poor Richard" almanacs (1733–58) appear in *PBF*, vols. 1–7. JA may have been familiar with "Silence Dogood" and very likely was acquainted with "Poor Richard." For a brief summary of Franklin's almanacs and their widespread distribution throughout British North America by the late 1740s, see *PBF*, 3:243–44, and 262n.

44. *PJA*, 1:61–62. See *PJA*, 1:59–60, on the Otis-Bernard controversy; and *D&A*, 1:211–12, and 3:275–76, on JA's admiration for Otis's argument against writs of assistance.

45. *PJA*, 1:62–63. This unsent letter's recipient is not named but is clear through context (see *PJA*, 1:60). The "three of the most intimate friends I ever had in my Life" whom JA accused Thomas Hutchinson with having "Seduced from my Bosom" were Jonathan Sewall, Samuel Quincy, and Daniel Leonard (JA to William Tudor, 16 Nov. 1816, LbC, Adams Papers). All were lawyers and all became Loyalist exiles. Sewall, whom JA met no later than September 1759, was by far his closest friend of the three (see *D&A*, 3:278, 287). See Carol Berkin, *Jonathan Sewall: Odyssey of an American Loyalist* (New York, 1974), for a full and thoughtful account of Sewall's life and career.

46. *PJA*, 1:63–66 ("Ploughjogger"), 66–72 ("U"). "Ploughjogger" concludes: "I wanted to let the world know I could if I try'd both spell and word a letter, abundance better than that [his first letter] was" (1:66).

47. *PJA*, 1:72–76. JA first paraphrased a passage from Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* in his diary in 1759 and began reading the work systematically in June 1760 (*D&A*, 1:115, 142).

48. *PJA*, 1:76–81; block quote at p. 81. JA's insistence on examining one's motives continues a theme he first expressed in the brief essay or memorandum entered into his diary in February (*D&A*, 1:242–43). The italicized words in the block quote appear in

the only source text, the *Boston Gazette* of 29 August 1763; they may or may not show JA's own emphasis.

49. *PJA*, 1:81–84; the manuscript source is a draft in the Adams Papers, with JA's postscript and docketing comment of 27 March 1807. The block quote is on p. 82. This piece must have been composed either immediately after the appearance of JA's third "U" letter on 29 August or perhaps shortly before that date, and been intended to appear as the next "U" essay, perhaps as early as 5 September, the day on which a different piece, referred to in this work as the fourth "U" essay, appeared.

50. The block quote appears in *PJA*, 1:83.

51. *PJA*, 1:84–90 ("U"); 90–94 ("Ploughjogger"). The two unidentified critics of JA's condemnation of private revenge in his second "U" essay to whom he responded in his fourth essay had signed themselves "X" and "W"; they appeared in the 22 August and 29 August issues of the *Boston Evening-Post*, respectively (*PJA*, 1:89n).

52. The quote from Juvenal in JA's 18 July "U" essay reads: *Haud facile emergent, quorum Virtutibus Obstat / Res angusta Domi*, which the Adams Papers editors translate as: "Those people do not easily emerge from obscurity whose abilities are cramped by narrow means at home" (1:68, 71n). "Humphrey Ploughjogger" translates the passage thus: "[A] man could not swim above water, that had poverty pulling him downwards at his heels" (*PJA*, 1:90).

53. JA to Charles Adams, 13 Feb. 1792, quoted in *PJA*, 1:58.

54. JA, *Works*, 3:427–44. These three pieces are JA's only essays of 1763 that Charles Francis Adams published. He may have been unaware that "Humphrey Ploughjogger" came from JA's pen or, more likely, thought its low humor unworthy of his grandfather's memory.

55. See *AFC*, 1:11–47; *D&A*, 3:280.

56. See *AFC*, 1:49, for JA's expectation of Abigail's beneficial effect on his life and character on the eve of his wedding (JA to AA, 30 Sept. 1764). In December 1760, JA recorded in his diary his strong feeling of disgust at the boorish and overbearing behavior of Dr. Bela Lincoln toward his new wife, the former Hannah Quincy, whom JA had courted in 1759 (*D&A*, 1:176–77). See also his brief statement that marriage was properly a contractual, nontyrannical relationship in his first *Novanglus* letter in 1775 (*PJA*, 2:230).

57. On JA's town office, see *Braintree Town Records*, 399–402; and see *PJA*, 1:98–100, on JA's previous work on improving Braintree's roads. On the birth of Abigail Adams the younger, usually called Nabby by her family and friends, see *AFC*, 1:51–52. JA describes his journey to Pownalborough, the county seat of Lincoln County on Maine's eastern frontier, in his autobiography; a diary entry of his travel expenses dates the trip's conclusion on 12 June (*D&A*, 1:258–59; 3:281–82).

58. See John L. Bullion, *A Great and Necessary Measure: George Grenville and the Genesis of the Stamp Act, 1763–1765* (Columbia, MO, 1982); P. D. G. Thomas, *British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis: The First Phase of the American Revolution, 1763–1767* (Oxford, 1975); and Edmund S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1953).

59. An introduction to and selections from the executive orders of 1763 and the Sugar Act of 1764 appear in Jack P. Greene, ed., *Colonies to Nation: 1763–1789* (New York, 1967), 12–24, which also prints selections from the protests by Otis and by the New York assembly, 28–39. On the customs service, see Thomas C. Barrow, *Trade and Empire: The British Customs Service in Colonial America, 1660–1775* (Cambridge, MA, 1967).

60. The text of the Stamp Act and related documents appear in Edmund S. Morgan, *Prologue to Revolution: Sources and Documents on the Stamp Act Crisis, 1764–1766* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1959).

61. JA's diary is the only source for the creation and early meetings of the "Sodalitas, a Clubb of Friends" (*D&A*, 1:251–55). Gridley's concern for the future leadership of the Boston bar was timely. Of the three leading attorneys that Gridley named, Oxenbridge Thacher would die later in 1765, and James Otis Jr. would become emotionally unstable by the early 1770s and have to retire; the third, Robert Auchmuty, would become a judge on New England's Vice-Admiralty court in 1767, but he retained his private practice and would assist JA and Josiah Quincy Jr., in the defense of the British soldiers charged in the Boston Massacre in 1770. Gridley, who would himself die in 1767, also invited Joseph Dudley, who was probably a little older than JA, to join the Sodality, but at least in JA's account, Gridley seemed to regard Dudley less highly than Fitch and JA. Dudley did attend a few Sodality sessions, but he, too, would die in 1767. Samuel Fitch, who was also several years older than JA, was never a highly successful attorney; he ended life as a Loyalist exile. By 1770, if not a little before, JA had become the undisputed leader of the Boston bar. See McKirdy, "Massachusetts Lawyers," 313–58, esp. the brief biographical sketches at 339–58.

62. JA's rough essay appears in his diary immediately below a line drawn under his account of the 21 February meeting of the Sodality (*D&A*, 1:255–58). The next entry following the essay is dated 15 August (1:259–61).

63. The annual Dudleian lectures were established by a bequest from the late chief justice of the Superior Court, Paul Dudley (d. 1751), who directed that every fourth year the lecture should focus on the sins and errors of the Church of Rome (*PJA*, 1:107n, 118–19n). Because JA makes no reference to the lectures in the draft essay in his diary, it seems likely this piece was composed between late February and early May. Substantial sections of this draft appear in JA's first three published *Dissertation* essays. The first published text contains no other significant material; in the second, only the brief passage on the Dudleian lectures is new. The third essay does incorporate new material, especially on freedom of the press in England and Massachusetts, but it makes no explicit reference to any recent events or laws. Only the last essay includes a quite brief condemnation of the Stamp Act. In his autobiography, JA remembers working on his *Dissertation* essays in his home office while Abigail was in confinement, awaiting the birth of her daughter. This would suggest the period from mid-June, when he returned from Maine, to his daughter's birth on 14 July, as the time when JA finished his first two essays, and probably much of his third (*D&A*, 3:284). A professional journey to Martha's Vineyard at the end of August may have delayed his making a few final changes in his third essay (published on 30 Sept.), and completing his fourth essay (published on 21 Oct.). See *D&A*, 1:263, 3:284; and JA, *Legal Papers*, 1:87–105.

64. For a summary of the *Dissertation*'s publication history, see *PJA*, 1:103–6.

65. *The Revolutionary Writings of John Adams*, ed. C. Bradley Thompson (Indianapolis, 2000), 20; *PJA*, 1:111–28 (quoted sentence on p. 127).

66. *PJA*, 1:111.

67. *D&A*, 1:259–61 (15 Aug.). The Stamp Act Congress issued its Declaration on 19 October.

68. See *PJA*, 1:129–32 (editorial note); and *D&A*, 3:282, for JA's inaccurate later account of the matter in his autobiography.

69. See the relevant passages in *PJA*, 1:134–35 (JA's draft), and 138–39 (the approved Braintree Instructions). The "great Charter of Liberties" to which JA referred was not

the celebrated Magna Carta, signed by King John in 1215, whose text had been all but forgotten for centuries until its publication by William Blackstone in 1758 and 1759 (*DNB*, 2:596, 601), but a quite similar document, commonly known as the Great Charter (and often called "Magna Charta"), signed by Henry III in 1225 and consistently regarded thereafter as fundamental by all English legal authorities, even after Blackstone published the earlier charter. See JA's citations in his December 1765 appeal to Governor Bernard to open the courts without stamps (discussed below), and as defense counsel in the 1768 case, *Sewall vs. Hancock*, arising out of the customs house seizure of the ship *Liberty*, both to the Great Charter, which he calls "Magna Charta" (*PJA*, 1:152–53; JA, *Legal Papers*, 2:200–201, and 201n).

70. The full texts appear in *PJA*, 1:140–43 (Braintree Instructions), 146–47 ("Humphrey Ploughjogger"), and 123–28 (the fourth *Dissertation* essay).

71. *D&A*, 1:265–70 (18–21 Dec. 1765); *PJA*, 1:148, 151–53. JA left no record in his legal papers of any action in a Massachusetts court from November 1765 through March 1766. He resumed his practice in the Plymouth and Suffolk inferior courts in April, and in the Plymouth Superior Court in May (JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:330). Massachusetts's probate courts did remain open throughout the winter, and the Suffolk Court of Common Pleas opened in January (*D&A*, 1:277n); and in his autobiography JA remembered playing a role in persuading Plymouth's Inferior Court to open before word of the Stamp Act's repeal reached America (*D&A*, 3:284). But Massachusetts's Superior Court, under the leadership of Chief Justice Thomas Hutchinson, remained closed for the duration of the statute.

72. *D&A*, 1:263.

73. *D&A*, 1:264 (first two quotations), 275 (last quotation).

74. See Greene, *Colonies to Nation*, 65–66; Bullion, *Great and Necessary Measure*, 191–92, and chap. 11.

75. JA's meager correspondence in this period is evident in *PJA*, 1:95–173, and *AFC*, 1:47–52.

76. Both the campaign to secure the creation of an American bishop and the missionary activity of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in various locations in North America, including Braintree, that already had English-speaking Christian congregations fed continued hostility between Anglican clergymen and dissenters in several colonies; see Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics, 1689–1775* (New York, 1962); and chap. 2, sect. 2, on "Sui Juris."

77. See *D&A*, 1:268–70, 271.

78. See *PJA*, 1:155–70. "William Pym"'s four essays appeared in the *London Public Ledger* on 13, 19, 26, and 30 August 1765; of these, only his second, of 19 August, was reprinted in the *Boston Evening Post*, on 25 November. Otis's six "Hampden" essays appeared from 9 December 1765 to 27 January 1766. It is possible that "William Pym" was not a pseudonym but the actual name of the essays' author (see Colin Nicholson, "The Revolutionary Politics of John Adams, 1760–1775," in David Waldstreicher, ed., *A Companion to John Adams and John Quincy Adams* [Chichester, UK, 2013], 69). But as JA treated the name as a pseudonym, and one that had a direct relationship to the seventeenth-century figure John Pym (see below in this section), the present discussion will treat the name from JA's viewpoint.

79. *D&A*, 1:268–70.

80. *PJA*, 1:148, 151–53, prints JA's rough notes for his appeal to Governor Bernard and Josiah Quincy's brief report of the appeal. Citations, primarily in JA's notes, are to the first and second parts of Cooke's celebrated *Institutes*, published in numerous seven-

teenth- and eighteenth-century editions; to a decision of Sir John Holt in *Modern Reports of Cases Adjudged in the Court of King's Bench from the Second Year of King William III to the End of His Reign*, London, 12 [1738]; and to Thomas Wood's *An Institute of the Laws of England*, the leading digest of English law from its first publication in 1720 until the appearance of Blackstone's *Commentaries* in 1769. On these authors and their works, see *ODNB*, 12:451–63 (Coke), 27:830–34 (Holt), and 60:145–46 (Wood); and *PJA*, 1:151n.

81. *D&A*, 1:263.

82. The draft texts appear at *D&A*, 1:272 (23 Dec.), 274–75 (25 Dec.), 275–77 (26 Dec.), 281–82 (30 Dec.), 287–88 (7 Jan.), 288–89 (9 Jan.), 290–92 (11 Jan.), and 296–99 (18 Jan.). JA's diary entry of 18 December (p. 263) furnished additional material for his second "Clarendon" essay.

83. *D&A*, 1:270–72, 274–75. JA also recorded brief sketches of two other club members, "Gray" (perhaps Harrison Gray, who became a Loyalist), and Thomas Cushing, who became a Patriot.

84. *PJA*, 1:155–57 (editorial note), 158–61 (first essay); quotations appear on p. 160.

85. *PJA*, 1:161–64 (second essay). On JA's growing awareness of his "Clarendon" problem, see *D&A*, 1:275–76, 287–88. JA has his "Clarendon" say "were I to write an History of your Opposition now, I should not entitle it a Rebellion; nay I should scarcely call the Protectorate of Cromwell, an Usurpation" (p. 162). This "confession" neatly summarizes JA's view of the English Civil War—and looks forward to his growing interest in England's Commonwealth tradition in the following decade—however unimaginable it may be in the mouth of Edward Hyde, the first Earl of Clarendon, the royalist leader and author of the posthumous *True Historical Narrative of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (1702–4), at any point in his career. In discussing the reactions of different colonies to the Stamp Act, JA erred in placing Georgia in opposition to the statute. That young colony, like Barbados, Jamaica, Nova Scotia, and Quebec, accepted the stamp tax. In addition to the five "Clarendon" drafts that JA incorporated in his three published letters, he left behind in his diary, unused in any printed essay, three other "Clarendon" fragments, including one that dealt briefly with the work of Hugo Grotius on international law (9 Jan.), and another that discussed the closing of the courts (11 Jan.), as well as a draft of "A Dissertation Upon Seekers—of Elections, of Commissions from the Governor, and of Commissions from the Crown" (30 Dec.), which cautioned voters against any man who seemed too eager to win an elective position, and condemned outright anyone who would accept a royal appointment (*D&A*, 1:287–88, 288–89, on Grotius; 290–92, on the courts; and 277, on office seekers).

86. *D&A*, 1:296–99; quotations on pp. 296, 297–98.

87. *PJA*, 1:164–70 (full text); the quotations are on pp. 165 and 167. The struck out sentence in JA's diary is at *D&A*, 1:298.

88. *PJA*, 1:167–68.

89. *PJA*, 1:168, 169.

90. *PJA*, 1:169, 170.

91. For JA's first brief remarks on the British constitution, see his unpublished "All man would be Tyrants if they could," at *PJA*, 1:83 (1763), and the final essay in his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* (1765), at *PJA*, 1:126.

92. *PJA*, 1:168, 170.

93. See *D&A*, 1:299–300 (the diary break from 20 Jan. to 1 Mar. 1766), 301–4 (1, 3 Mar., on JA's election as selectman), 292, 308 (13 Jan. and 10 Apr., on the respective openings of the Suffolk and Plymouth Inferior Courts), and 312 and 312–13n (26 May,

Ebenezer Thayer's defeat of JA for provincial assemblyman). Two of JA's colleagues as selectmen were Norton Quincy, Abigail Adams's first cousin and heir to the aged John Quincy, and Ebenezer Thayer.

94. Nearly all of JA's political writings from December 1766 through February 1767 appear, with an editorial note and annotation, under the title "Replies to Philanthrop, Defender of Governor Bernard," in *PJA*, 1:174–211. The quotation is from JA's essay as "Governor Winthrop," in the *Boston Gazette*, 9 Feb. 1767, *PJA*, 1:199. JA's suggestion that "Philanthrop" regarded the free government of England as "a kind of machine, calculated for perpetual motion and duration," inevitably calls to mind Michael Kammen's *A Machine That Would Go of Itself: The Constitution in American Culture* (New York, 1986). The source of Kammen's striking title was not JA, but the American writer and poet James Russell Lowell, who coined this phrase in a speech to The Reform Club of New York in 1888. But as Kammen himself points out, the idea of a political constitution as a machine originated in the early years of the English Enlightenment and gained a powerful impetus from Isaac Newton's image of the solar system as a grand celestial machine. JA's view of the matter in 1767 was similar to Lowell's over a century later, and to that of Newton's contemporary William Penn nearly a century earlier; all warned that constitutions were not mere machines "calculated for perpetual motion and duration," but must be infused with the energy and guidance of living men (Kammen, 17–18; William Penn's introduction to *The Frame of the Government of the Province of Pennsylvania* [London, 1682], in *The Papers of William Penn*, vol. 2, *1681–1684*, ed. Richard S. Dunn and Mary M. Dunn [Philadelphia, 1982], 213).

95. See *D&A*, 1:333n (JA's reelection as selectman); 1:338n and 3:287 (the birth and naming of John Quincy Adams); and 1:229–30, 322–23 (JA's discussion of farm improvements in Oct. 1762 and Nov. 1766).

96. See *D&A*, 1:338n, and JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:325–49 ("Chronology[:] John Adams' Legal Career, 1756–1778"), on JA's rapidly expanding legal practice; *D&A*, 1:316 (28 July 1766), on his involvement in the Suffolk County bar; chap. 2, for his involvement in Boston's patriotic politics; and *D&A*, 1:339n, and 3:286, for his announcement that he would not seek another term as selectman, and his move to Boston.

97. *D&A*, 1:263–65, 278, 281, and 324; *AFC*, 1:52.

98. JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:325–49.

99. Coquillette, "Justinian in Braintree," 359–418.

Chapter II. The Discovery of the Republic, 1768–1772

Epigraph: D&A, 2:57.

1. See Robert R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*, vol. 1, *The Challenge* (Princeton, NJ, 1954).

2. The magisterial account of the creation and transmission of the classical republican tradition is J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ, 1975).

3. See Edmund S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1953); and for the English side of the event, John L. Bullion, *A Great and Necessary Measure: George Grenville and the Genesis of the Stamp Act, 1763–1765* (Columbia, MO, 1982), and P. D. G. Thomas, *British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis: The First Phase of the American Revolution, 1763–1767* (Oxford, 1975).

4. Among the many works that deal with the Townshend Act crisis, see especially Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763–1776* (New York, 1918); Thomas C. Barrow, *Trade and Empire: The British Customs Service in*

Colonial America, 1660–1775 (Cambridge, MA, 1967); Hiller B. Zobel, *The Boston Massacre* (New York, 1970); Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765–1776* (New York, 1972); Richard Alan Ryerson, *The Revolution Is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765–1776* (Philadelphia, 1978), chap. 2; Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), esp. chap. 12; Peter D. G. Thomas, *The Townshend Duties Crisis: The Second Phase of the American Revolution, 1767–1773* (Oxford, 1987); R. J. Chaffin, "The Townshend Act Crisis," in Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, eds., *Blackwell's Encyclopedia of the American Revolution* (Oxford, 1991), 126–45; and Benjamin L. Carp, *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution* (Oxford, 2007).

5. See Zobel, *Boston Massacre*; Schlesinger, *Colonial Merchants*; Ryerson, *Revolution Is Now Begun*, chap. 2; Carp, *Rebels Rising*; and Neil Longley York, "Rival Truths, Political Accommodation, and the Boston 'Massacre,'" *Massachusetts Historical Review* 11 (2009): 57–95.

6. See Louis B. Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (London, 1929), and *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (London, 1930); and W. A. Speck, "The Structure of British Politics in the Mid-Eighteenth Century," in Greene and Pole, *Blackwell's Encyclopedia*, 3–8.

7. There is no broad, intercolonial study of the "quiet period" (fall 1770 to summer 1773), but for good accounts of some of the most important controversies see Jack P. Greene, "Ongoing Disputes over the Prerogative, 1763–1776," in Greene and Pole, *Blackwell's Encyclopedia*, 171–77; and Richard D. Brown, *Revolutionary Politics in Massachusetts: The Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Towns, 1772–1774* (Cambridge, MA, 1970). Thomas, *Townshend Duties Crisis*, chaps. 11–13, assesses the mood of this period in political Britain.

8. *D&A*, 1:337; 3:286–87; JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:326–33.

9. See *PJA*, vol. 1, whose editors identified no publications solely by JA from June 1768 through December 1772. On "Sui Juris," see *PJA*, 1:211–13. JA began drafts of three essays for submission to the press—in January[?] 1770 (*D&A*, 1:349), in August[?] 1770 (*D&A*, 1:364–65), and in February 1772 (*D&A*, 2:53–54)—but apparently never finished them. On the broader controversy over placing an Anglican bishop in America, see Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics, 1689–1775* (New York, 1962), chaps. 9–11.

10. Massachusetts Patriots who gathered for large dinners to honor their heroes and their cause would propose and drink up to forty-five toasts, in honor of John Wilkes's zealous declaration of Whig principles in the forty-fifth issue of his *North Briton Review*, and even ninety-two toasts, to honor the ninety-two legislators who voted not to rescind the House of Representatives Circular Letter. JA briefly records attending a patriotic dinner for some "350 Sons of Liberty" in Dorchester in August 1769, at which forty-five toasts were drunk, but he remarks that the event was quite sober (*D&A*, 1:341, 342n). The Revere bowl, which also commemorates Wilkes's No. 45 *North Briton*, both in its engraving and in its very weight (forty-five ounces of silver) and liquid capacity (forty-five gills), is in the American collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. See Zobel, *Boston Massacre*, 82, 100 (illustration), and 329n.

11. *D&A*, 3:286.

12. JA either signed or apparently approved as a committeeman three such pieces in 1768, six in 1769, and one in 1770. They are Committee of the Boston Sons of Liberty to John Wilkes, 6 June 1768 (*PJA*, 1:214–16); Instructions of Boston to its Representatives in

the General Court, 17 June 1768 (*PJA*, 1:216–20); Committee of the Boston Sons of Liberty to John Wilkes, 5 October 1768 (*PJA*, 1:220–23); Petition of the Boston Town Meeting to King George III, 4 April 1769 (*PJA*, 1:223–24, calendared); Draft Instructions of Boston to its Representatives in the General Court, 8 May 1769 (*PJA*, 1:224–30); Boston Town Meeting Committee Report, 18 October 1769 (*PJA*, 1:230–31, calendared); Boston Town Meeting Committee to Dennis De Berdt, 23 October 1769 (*PJA*, 1:231–32); Boston Town Meeting Committee to Benjamin Franklin, 23 October 1769 (*PJA*, 1:232, calendared); Committee of the Boston Sons of Liberty to John Wilkes, 4 November 1769 (*PJA*, 1:232–36); and Boston Town Meeting Committee Report, 29 September 1770 (*PJA*, 1:248–49, calendared).

13. The committees that drafted and signed these productions ranged from five to ten members. JA is thought to have had a major role in drafting at least two of these ten pieces, the instructions of 17 June 1768 (see *PJA*, 1:218–19n) and of 8 May 1769 (*PJA*, 1:228–29n), but he probably played an important role in writing several others.

14. Sewall probably made this offer in October 1768, when he accepted the appointment as chief justice of the new Vice-Admiralty court in Halifax, Nova Scotia, or shortly thereafter. At this same time, Governor Bernard was trying to find a new occupant for the post of attorney general, which Sewall also held. From 1768 to 1770, Governor Bernard and his successor, Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson, encountered insurmountable obstacles, both political and economic, to filling these important positions with qualified lawyers. Sewall ultimately remained in Massachusetts, and although Samuel Fitch would serve as advocate general for a time, Sewall was again advocate general, and still attorney general, all the while deputizing his judicial duties in Halifax, on the eve of his departure from Boston for London in August 1775 (Carol Berkin, *Jonathan Sewall: Odyssey of an American Loyalist* [New York, 1974], 43–45, 80–82, 115).

15. *D&A*, 3:290–91. JA even claimed that, at the time of his election to the assembly from Boston in June 1770, he had never yet attended town meeting (3:294).

16. *D&A*, 1:337. JA quotes lines 363–68 of Pope's *Essay on Man*, epistle 4; see Zoltan Haraszti, *John Adams & the Prophets of Progress* (Cambridge, MA, 1952), 72.

17. See chap. 1, sect. 2; and Daniel R. Coquillette, "Justinian in Braintree: John Adams, Civilian Learning, and Legal Elitism, 1758–1775," in Coquillette, ed., *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, vol. 62, *Law in Colonial Massachusetts, 1630–1800* (Boston, 1984), 359–418.

18. See chap. 1, sect. 2.

19. *D&A*, 1:179 (Machiavelli, Dec. 1760); JA's inscription in his copy of Sidney's *Discourses* (John Adams's Library, Rare Book Room, Boston Public Library). JA remarked to Jefferson in 1823 that he had first read Sidney at "four and twenty," that is, about 1759–60 (*Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:598). The fact that JA's first substantial references to Locke (*D&A*, 1:47; *Earliest Diary*, 69; and a reminiscence of a conversation in his autobiography at *D&A*, 3:272, all in 1758; and *PJA*, 1:42 [1760]) are all to his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, and preceded by several years any clear references to the political John Locke (*PJA*, 1:127 [1765], 344 [1773], 2:230 [1775]; and *D&A*, 2:57 [1772], and 3:358 [remembering 1775]), is hardly surprising. Locke's *Understanding* had been central to a liberal Harvard education for decades, but his political treatises had far less impact in America before the Stamp Act crisis.

20. *A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law*, in *PJA*, 1:127 (Locke and Sidney); *D&A*, 1:347 (reading Sidney). In Thomas Hollis's London publications of the *Dissertation*, ten names appear where the *Boston Gazette* has only eight. Five men, in-

cluding Sidney and Locke, appear on both lists. This alteration by a radical English Whig obscured JA's point in this passage. JA was not arguing that the encroachments on liberty by the early Stuart monarchs only produced those great republicans—the seventeenth-century Commonwealth forerunners of England's eighteenth-century Commonwealthmen and radical Whigs—who filled up the list of ten in Hollis's republication, but instead that the Stuarts' heavy-handed policies, "by turning the general attention of learned men to government, are said to have produced the greatest number of consummate statesmen which has ever been seen in any age or nation." JA's list of eight men that followed included the royalists Clarendon (whose signature he would employ as a pseudonym in 1766) and Falkland; Hollis's list of ten had no room for royalists but added several Parliamentarians and Commonwealthmen, notably John Milton, Henry Neville, and Marchamont Nedham. Charles Francis Adams, in compiling the *Works of John Adams* (see 3:463), followed the text of the first publication of JA's *Dissertation* as a single work under its current title, in London in 1768, and thereby preserved—and disseminated to unwary modern readers—a purely republican list of heroes that is not JA's own and that suggested JA was reading or thinking about Neville and Nedham well before he is known to have had any interest in them.

21. *D&A*, 1:73, 115–16, 123, 142–43; and *PJA*, 1:75 (on Montesquieu); *PJA*, 1:117 (on Rousseau). JA also cited the recent histories of Britain by David Hume and Tobias Smollet in his second "Governor Winthrop" essay, of February 1767 (see chap. 1, sect. 5).

22. Fragmentary but often extensive sections of JA's diary in the late 1750s read something like a literary commonplace book but are too unsystematic to give a clear picture of his early reading even then. After the early 1760s, his diary quite ceases to have this literary function. See especially JA's *Earliest Diary*, 53–60, 69–80 (1758–59); and *D&A*, 1:72–121 (1759). In 1759, JA also kept an alphabetically arranged commonplace book of legal themes and definitions; its organization was evidently modeled on a commonplace book of John Locke. See JA, *Legal Papers*, 1:1–2, 4–25.

23. The fullest treatment of the Massacre and the ensuing trials is Hiller Zobel's *Boston Massacre*, which meticulously reconstructs the event itself (chap. 16). A revisionist assessment, Neil York's "Rival Truths," *Massachusetts Historical Review* 11 (2009), includes a succinct listing of comments on and critiques of Zobel at p. 88n3.

24. *D&A*, 3:291–96 (block quote at 3:292–93). JA's diary for 1770 is quite irregular, with no entry between 26 February and 19 June, and he left almost no extant correspondence for this period (*PJA*, 1:248–49).

25. See, for example, JA's portrayal in his autobiography of his October 1758 interview with Jeremiah Gridley as the initial motivation for his studying continental jurisprudence (*D&A*, 3:270–72), which his diary disproves (*D&A*, 1:44–45); and his claim that his draft instructions to Braintree's representative during the Stamp Act crisis were accepted without change by the town meeting (*D&A*, 3:382), which town records disprove (see chap. 1, sects. 2 and 4). In his autobiography JA also occasionally misremembers the date of an event, and Mr. Forest's visit to his office might have happened some days after 6 March 1770, although no later date suggests itself.

26. Zobel, *Boston Massacre*, 219–21. Zobel cites as evidence of initial radical support for JA's joining the defense a letter that his young colleague, Josiah Quincy Jr. wrote to his father, in which he named several radicals who had urged him (Quincy) to take on the case. The radicals, in Zobel's view, had no qualms about making the legal skills of Quincy and JA available to the soldiers because "in the flush of triumph at having seen the self-fulfilling prophecies of town-troop bloodshed enacted, [they] failed to consider the possibility of an acquittal" (p. 221).

27. York, "Rival Truths," argues that the Patriot leadership, from the outset, had little interest in legally convicting the soldiers as long as they won the propaganda battle to portray the confrontation as a massacre. To this end, he gives a vivid account, with illustrations, of the Patriots' extensive pamphlet and broadside campaign against the soldiers, including the prompt publication of the compelling print of the event, drawn by Henry Pelham and published by Paul Revere, which immediately gained, and has never lost, iconic status.

28. See Zobel, *Boston Massacre*, 221–23, 231, 239, on the repeated delay of the trials; chap. 1, sect. 5, on JA's bid to enter the legislature in 1766; *D&A*, 3:291, on JA's presence on the evening of 5 March, "in company with a Clubb, with whom I had been associated for several Years" (and compare with JA's attendance at Boston political clubs—possibly all the same club—in December 1765, August 1769, and January 1770 [*D&A*, 1:270–71, 343, 438–39]); and *PJA*, 1:238, on JA's election to the House on 6 June 1770. In that election he was opposed by a successful shipwright who was popular with Boston's "Tradesmen and Mechanicks" (*D&A*, 3:294), which makes the necessity of support by Patriot leaders for his victory seem more likely.

29. *PJA*, 1:241–48, gives a full summary of JA's known activity as a legislator from June 1770 through April 1771, including his committee assignments. The House of Representatives elected in May 1770 held four sessions: May–June, July–August, and September–November 1770; and April 1771. JA evidently attended most of the first session, beginning immediately after his election, and most or all of the second session, but he must have missed some of the third session when Captain Preston's trial was in progress. He attended only the middle portion of the last session, from 10 to 17 April. He was assigned to three committees in June, one in July, one in September, four in October, three in November, one during an intersession in December, and two in April. On 17 October, he was excused from further service on a committee that was entrusted with seeking Governor Hutchinson's consent to a fast day.

30. JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:17–24 (editors' introduction), 46–98 (trial documents); Berkin, *Jonathan Sewall*, 83–86; Zobel, *Boston Massacre*, chap. 18; York, "Rival Truths," 80–81.

31. JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:24–31 (editors' introduction), 98–314 (trial documents); Zobel, *Boston Massacre*, chap. 19; York, "Rival Truths," 81–86.

32. JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:31, on JA's compassion for Kilroy and Montgomery; and *D&A*, 2:79 (5 Mar. 1773, the third anniversary of the Massacre). See also *D&A*, 3:296, where he records a similar feeling of pride in his autobiography. JA's awareness in 1773 of the "foul Stain" on Massachusetts for its execution of Quakers in the 1650s and the Salem "witches" in the 1690s contrasts with his idealized portrait of the Puritan colony in his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* in 1765.

33. JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:36–38, 242–70. The text of JA's summation first appeared in a 217-page octavo volume entitled *The Trial of William Wemms* [and others] . . . *for the Murder of Crispus Attucks* [and others] . . . *Taken in Short-Hand* . . . (Boston, 1770), which appeared in mid-January 1771. Although this work presents a defective transcript of the trial in many places and JA complained about these shortcomings, it evidently conveyed his summation extensively and accurately. Yet its thirty printed pages did not record JA's whole summation, as it explicitly omitted much of his "minute consideration of every witness produced on the crown side" (JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:269). In 1770, JA did begin two drafts that were evidently intended as newspaper articles, but they are too brief to permit substantial analysis (see n. 9, above).

34. JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:242–60 (review of the law), and 260–69 (review of the facts).

35. JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:242, quoting Beccaria's *An Essay on Crimes and Punishments* (London, 1770), 42–43. JA first entered a quotation from this first translation of Beccaria's work into English in his diary on 28 June 1770 (*D&A*, 1:352), about as early as he could have seen this edition, and the quotation he recorded is exactly the one he used in his summation in December.

36. JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:250. JA's ranking of the basic types of governments by the degree of their despotism, from the total despotism of absolute autocracies, through aristocracies, and then mixed monarchies, to the least despotic, "compleat Republicks," closely resembles his ranking of governments for their degree of liberty in his oration at Braintree of 1772 (see sect. 5; and *D&A*, 2:58–59).

37. JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:269–70. The Latin phrase *mens sine affectu* may be translated as "reason [literally, the mind] without feeling."

38. In his *Thoughts on Government* (Apr. 1776), JA remarked: "A MAN must be indifferent to the sneers of modern Englishmen to mention in their company the names of Sidney, Harrington, Locke, Milton, Nedham, Neville, Burnet, and Hoadley. No small fortitude is necessary to confess that one has read them" (*PJA*, 4:87; see chap. 5).

39. *D&A*, 3:296.

40. JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:337–39; *D&A*, 1:348–65; 3:296; *PJA*, 1:238–47.

41. JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:339–40; *D&A*, 2:6–9, 15; 3:294–95, 296; *PJA*, 1:247–48, 249.

42. *D&A*, 2:15–35 (30 May–14 June 1771); compare *D&A*, 1:263–300, for JA's unusually full diary entries for 18 December 1765 through 20 January 1766. It is tempting to imagine that JA, from the perspective of his first journey outside his native province, may have begun to think of his "country" as extending beyond the boundaries of Massachusetts to embrace all of New England. But his only observations on political discussions that he heard in Connecticut show no expansion of his provincial viewpoint (see *D&A*, 2:32; and sect. 5, below).

43. *D&A*, 2:19–45.

44. *D&A*, 3:296.

45. The quotes appear at *D&A*, 2:21 (3 June), 2:28 (7 June), and 2:33 (10 and 12 June); and see a similar sentiment at 2:29–30 (8 June).

46. *D&A*, 2:34. JA's scriptural quotation is from Psalm 133, verse 1; he was reacting not only to the legislators' new harmonious relations with the governor but to the friendly addresses to Hutchinson from associations of clergymen, printed in the *Boston Evening Post* on 3 June (*D&A*, 2:35n).

47. *D&A*, 2:34–35. The definition of fautors is from the *OED*.

48. See above at n. 16 (quotation from *D&A*, 1:337).

49. *D&A*, 2:35. JA had just read the 13 June issue of the *Boston News Letter*, which carried the provincial Council's friendly reply to the governor's address and a report of the cordial dinner attended by the governor and many legislators on 4 June, the king's birthday (*D&A*, 2:35n). The ministers', governor's, and Council's addresses were all on the occasion of the opening of the new provincial legislature for the year 1771–72.

50. See chap. 1, sect. 5.

51. *D&A*, 1:352. From 1758 through 1773, the fullest periods of JA's diary are October 1758–September 1759, October 1760–March 1761, December 1765–January 1766, and May–June 1771 (his trip to Connecticut), but occasional extended entries of great interest do appear in other periods, for example, that of 30 Jan.1768, quoted above in this chapter. Some other seasons—the winters of 1760 and 1762, and both the spring and fall of 1763—lack any entries, and there are no entries for all of 1764, and from February 1768

to August 1769. Altogether, JA's diary extends just over thirty years, 1755 through 1787, before becoming totally fragmentary for another decade, and then ceasing.

52. *D&A*, 2:52 (2 Feb. 1772), and 2:67 (second entry of 21 Nov. 1772).

53. See *D&A*, 1:341–42 (anxiety over his patriotic participation), 1:343 ("working the political Engine"), 1:343, 348–49, 350 (putting up with Otis); and 1:342 (his unappreciated patriotic sacrifices), all from August 1769 through February 1770.

54. *D&A*, 2:5–7 (15 Feb.; 16, 20 Apr.).

55. *D&A*, 2:11 (3 and 2 May). The two "valuable Clients" were Ezekiel Goldthwait, Registrar of Deeds for Suffolk County, and Harrison Gray, Treasurer of the province; see *D&A*, 1:270–71; 2:1, 11n, 12n.

56. See JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:326–47, which shows the volume of JA's legal practice growing dramatically, and quite steadily, from 1762 through 1771, when it peaked, and then declining slightly in 1772 and 1773, but remaining higher than in any year through 1770, until national service curtailed his legal career in 1774. Entries at *D&A*, 2:6, 46, and 67 show JA's avoidance, in 1771 and 1772, of the political clubs he had attended in 1769 and 1770 (*D&A*, 1:343, 348, 350; 3:291); he did attend a club meeting in May 1772 (*D&A*, 2:13). His political compositions of 1772 and 1773 are discussed below, and in chap. 3.

57. On the political harmony subsisting between Governor Hutchinson and the legislature, beginning as early as the fall of 1770 and extending through 1771, before breaking down completely in 1772 and 1773, see *D&A*, 2:10, 11, 15; Bernard Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson* (Cambridge, MA, 1974), 169–84; and Brown, *Revolutionary Politics*, 34–37, 38–48.

58. *D&A*, 2:61n (citing *Braintree Town Records*, p. 435), 56–61 (text of the draft).

59. See Palmer, *Age of the Democratic Revolution*, vol. 1, chaps. 1–3, on the variety of structures of government in Europe about 1760, the condition of the continent's many aristocracies, and the appearance, on the horizon, of the concept of democracy.

60. The only important modern continental authors that JA read and cited who were not natives of republics were Samuel Pufendorf, who was raised in Saxony, and France's Baron Montesquieu.

61. See chap. 1, sect. 5 ("Clarendon to Pym"); *D&A*, 1:347 (reading Sidney); JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:269–70 (quoting Sidney), and 250 (use of "compleat Republick's"); and *D&A*, 1:360–61, and 2:75–76 (correspondence with Mrs. Macaulay).

62. *D&A*, 2:29 (8 June).

63. It may have been of some importance to JA that Connecticut, where he encountered these rustic "Republicans," was in effect a republic within the British Empire. Both Connecticut and Rhode Island (but no other British colonies) chose all their political officers, including their governors; the only royal officials within their borders were a few customs agents. It is, of course, possible that JA was making a pun on the word "publicans," as suggested at a seminar at which a draft of this chapter was presented. But this strikes the writer as, at most, a secondary intention. Only the tavern owner, Mrs. Griswold, was a publican, and if JA was making a pun, he had never before done so on either "publican" or "republican," and would not do so again. The deputy governor of Connecticut in 1771, Matthew Griswold, perhaps a relation of the landlady by marriage, would serve as governor in the 1780s. His wife Ursala was a daughter of Roger Wolcott, a governor in the 1750s (*ANB*, 9:641–43, 23:724–25).

64. JA entered the rough draft for the oration at Braintree in his diary (*D&A*, 2:56–61), just as he had done for most of his earlier compositions, including his "Clarendon" essays of 1766. The Adams Papers editors point to substantial blank spaces

between several of the sections of the draft of his Braintree oration and to "the discontinuity of the thought, and variations in ink," which all suggest that he developed his text in distinct parts, on several separated days that could have extended from shortly after receiving the invitation to speak on 2 March, to very near his presumed delivery on 18 May (election day).

65. *D&A*, 2:56, 56–57, 57. See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning the True Origin, Extent and End of Government* (his *Second Treatise on Government*) (London, 1690), chaps. 1–2, and 7–9.

66. *D&A*, 2:57–58. Compare this with JA's simpler treatment of governmental forms in his third "Clarendon" essay, *PJA*, 1:167–69.

67. *D&A*, 2:58. The space between the third and fourth paragraphs is in JA's diary text, and may indicate that the fourth paragraph was composed at some later date than the first three. Compare the remarks on liberty and knowledge in this passage with JA's praise of education in the fourth essay of his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* (*PJA*, 1:126–27), and in the concluding section of his draft of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 (see chap. 6).

68. *D&A*, 2:58–59. JA elaborates: "Even in the simple Democracies of ancient Greece, Jealous as they were of Power, even their Ostracism could not always preserve them from the grasping Desires and Designs, from the overbearing Popularity, of their great Men" (p. 59). Several early Greek city-states were democracies and at least some of these evidently ostracized their citizens, but only Athenian ostracism was widely known in the eighteenth century (see Eric W. Robinson, *Democracy beyond Athens: Popular Government in the Greek Classical Age* [Cambridge, 2011]). JA's approval of ancient Athens in 1772 was all the more remarkable because in the eighteenth century the current historical literature on the world's first well-documented democracy was of poor quality and highly biased against the Athenians' system of government. See Jennifer Tolbert Roberts, *Athens on Trial: The Antidemocratic Tradition in Western Thought* (Princeton, NJ, 1994).

69. *D&A*, 2:59–60. In the case of England, JA observed that "the common Rout to Power has been by making clamorous Professions of Patriotism, in early Life, to secure a great Popularity, and to ride upon that Popularity, into the highest Offices of State, and after they have arrived there, they have been generally found, as little zealous to preserve the Constitution, as their Predecessors whom they have hunted down" (p. 59). The three English leaders whom JA named for taking this road to power were Thomas Wentworth (1593–1641), first Earl of Strafford, who served Charles I before being impeached and condemned to death by Parliament; Robert Harley (1661–1724), first Earl of Oxford, who headed the Tory ministry under Queen Anne from 1710 to 1714 and later survived a parliamentary impeachment; and Sir Robert Walpole (1676–1745), the dominant figure in British politics for nearly three decades, and often regarded as Britain's first prime minister; see *ODNB*, 58:142–57 (Wentworth); 25:317–26 (Harley); and 57:67–92 (Walpole).

JA, like many British North Americans and many British Whigs, living in an era that had only a rudimentary understanding of pre-Norman English history, believed in a largely mythical Saxon liberty that was crushed by the Norman invaders and first restored by Magna Carta (1215) and its immediate successor, the Great Charter of 1225. See Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1969), 31, 122, 227–28, 230.

70. *D&A*, 2:60.

71. *D&A*, 2:60–61. JA had first criticized Barbados, along with Jamaica, in 1766, when he learned that the island colonies had agreed to enforce the Stamp Act (*D&A*,

1:285). In August 1770, a Virginian visiting Massachusetts informed JA, who knew relatively little history of the southern colonies, that under Charles II, Virginia's House of Burgesses had, at the urging of the Crown, voted for an independent salary for Virginia's governor (*D&A*, 1:364). But while Barbados and other British West Indian islands had a quite limited capacity to oppose Britain's imperial will, JA's implication that Virginia was at the mercy of its powerful royal governors was quite mistaken. In the eighteenth century the House of Burgesses became one of the stronger lower houses in British North America; by the 1760s probably only the assemblies of Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina (and, of course, Connecticut and Rhode Island) had more power. See Jack P. Greene, *The Quest for Power: The Lower Houses of Assembly in the Southern Royal Colonies, 1689–1776* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1963), 4–7, 129–32. And see the Massachusetts House of Representatives' first reply to Governor Hutchinson (January 1773), in which JA turns the story of the Burgesses' 1679 vote of a permanent salary for Virginia's governor to a quite different purpose (chap. 3).

72. See chap. 1, sect. 3, for JA's first reference to Locke's social contract theory in his second "U" essay, of 1 Aug. 1763.

73. *D&A*, 2:57.

74. *D&A*, 2:58.

75. *D&A*, 2:58–59.

76. *D&A*, 2:61n, 59, 60. Even allowing for his local circumstances, however, JA's strong praise of democracy was quite radical in the 1770s. Some measure of his daring is suggested by R. R. Palmer, who, in *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*, 1:13–20, argues that the new word *democrat*, and the old words *democratic* and *democracy*, when used positively in a contemporary context, were unknown in print, either in Europe or in America, until their first appearance in Holland in the 1780s, from whence contemporary usages for all three words, used positively and negatively, spread rapidly to Belgium, France, Britain, and the United States.

77. See JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:342–44, and *D&A*, 2:61–63 (his legal practice and general prosperity); *D&A*, 2:63, 67, and 3:296–97 (his health, and purchasing and moving to his Boston house); and *D&A*, 2:67 (his continued aversion to politics).

78. See chap. 1.

79. The first clear evidence of JA's having read Locke's *Two Treatises*, and a hint of having read Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, appear in his notes for his election-day oration in Braintree; see *D&A*, 2:57.

Chapter III. Realm versus Dominion, 1773–1774

Epigraph: PJA, 1:328–29.

1. Richard Bland, *An Enquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies* (Williamsburg, 1766; London, 1769); James Wilson, *Considerations on the Authority of Parliament* (Philadelphia, 1774). Thomas Jefferson's *A Summary View of the Rights of British-America* (Philadelphia, 1774), also declared the colonies' independence from Parliament, but it was written well after JA made this argument in the Massachusetts House of Representatives' replies to Governor Hutchinson in the winter of 1773.

2. Bernard Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson* (Cambridge, MA, 1974), 196–203; Richard D. Brown, *Revolutionary Politics in Massachusetts: The Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Towns, 1772–1774* (Cambridge, MA, 1970), 49–51. By May 1772, JA had heard the rumor that the British ministry intended to pay Governor Hutchinson's salary and treated it as an established fact; see the notes for his election-day oration at Braintree, *D&A*, 2:60.

3. *D&A*, 2:73–74, 75. It is not known why JA believed that the relatively early deaths of Jonathan Mayhew (1720–66) and Oxenbridge Thacher (1719–65) could be attributed to a collapse of their health under the stress of resisting British policy in Massachusetts (a belief he had already expressed in February 1772; see *D&A*, 2:55). The available evidence suggests that both men died of unexceptional natural causes. The case of James Otis Jr. (1725–83) is more problematical. His mental state deteriorated over a period of several years after 1765, but with unexpected remissions. His politics were usually ardently Whig, but on several occasions veered sharply to Tory repentance. See *ANB*, 14:775–76 (Mayhew), and 16:838–40 (Otis); and Sibley-Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, 10:322–28 (Thacher), and 11:440–72 (Mayhew).

4. *D&A*, 2:75–76. On New Year's Eve, JA was visiting his close friend and brother-in-law, Richard Cranch, and recorded that a "Mr. Collins an English Gentleman was there"; it is not known whether anyone else was present. On 1 January 1773, he followed his expression of satisfaction quoted in the text with the hope and expectation that he could avoid politics, but he spent that very evening with several politically active friends in Boston, including the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Thomas Cushing, and Dr. Joseph Warren (*D&A*, 2:77).

5. The definitive study of the creation, operation, and achievements of Boston's Committee of Correspondence is Brown's *Revolutionary Politics*, esp. chaps. 3–5. According to Brown's estimate, based on necessarily incomplete data, at least 119 out of Massachusetts's 260 towns responded positively to Boston's appeal by April 1773, with another 25 joining in by September. In Essex, Middlesex, and Suffolk, Massachusetts's three wealthiest and most populous eastern counties, and in Cumberland County, the most commercial part of Maine, between 74 and 89 percent of the towns supported Boston. In six less densely populated counties in southern and central Massachusetts and in Maine, the positive responses ranged from 40 to 67 percent. Only Hampshire and Berkshire counties, in the west, recorded little enthusiasm for Boston's appeal (*Revolutionary Politics*, 94–98).

6. *PJA*, 1:252–54 (editorial note).

7. *PJA*, 1:254–55 (editorial note), 256–68, 273–309; *D&A*, 2:77–78, and 3:297–98. JA would not again sign any publication on its first appearance until he issued his 19 April 1781 Memorial to the States General of the Netherlands, published in pamphlet form in Leyden, Holland, in May 1781. See *PJA*, 11:272–82, and chap. 7.

8. *PJA*, 1:256–61 (letter 1). In his last published letter on this subject, General Brattle stated that he had heard of a removal of a provincial judge by "one or two arbitrary administrations. I recollect but two since the charter [of 1691]; but these were arbitrary, illegal, and unconstitutional measures, and do not determine what the law is" (*Boston Gazette*, 18 Jan. 1773, in *PJA*, 1:269). In 1702, upon entering office, Governor Joseph Dudley, one of Massachusetts's more vindictive executives, refused to recommission one Superior Court judge, his political enemy Elisha Cooke. Thereafter, from 1703 to 1773, some two-thirds of the Superior Court judges died in office; the remainder voluntarily resigned, either to take other positions or due to advanced age. See *ANB*, 5:392, on Cooke; Charles R. McKirdy, "Massachusetts Lawyers on the Eve of the American Revolution: The State of the Profession," in Daniel R. Coquillette, ed., *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, vol. 62, *Law in Colonial Massachusetts, 1630–1800* (Boston, 1984), 329–32, for a judicial list; and Sibley-Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, vols. 1–12, for biographical sketches of a majority of the judges.

9. *PJA*, 1:258–61 (letter 1), and 261–67, 273–309 (letters 2–7). Among the high court judges removed from the bench was the greatest of all English legal authors, in the

estimation of JA and many others, in both England and America: Sir Edward Coke, in 1616 (*ODNB*, 12:451–63, esp. 455–56).

10. See chap. 1, sect. 5, on "Clarendon"; and *D&A*, 2:3–5 (12 Feb. 1771), on jurors.

11. See chap. 8; and JA, *Works*, 4:358, 359, and 382, for JA's suggestions for perfecting the British constitution in the first volume of his *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*.

12. A full discussion of the exchange between Governor Hutchinson and the House of Representatives in 1773 follows immediately below. In his message of 6 January to the House, Hutchinson declared: "[I]t is impossible the rights of English subjects should be the same, in every respect, in all parts of the dominions" (Jack P. Greene, ed., *Colonies to Nation, 1763–1789* [New York, 1967], 184–85; excepted from Alden E. Bradford, ed., *Speeches of the Governors of Massachusetts from 1764 to 1775* [Boston, 1818]). Bernard Bailyn points out that Hutchinson had said this before, both in public statements and in his private correspondence with Thomas Whatley. The Massachusetts House would publish that correspondence to explosive effect in June 1773 (*Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*, 209; see sect. 3, below).

13. Brown, *Revolutionary Politics*, 51–57; Bailyn, *Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*, 203–6.

14. Brown, *Revolutionary Politics*, 82–86; Bailyn, *Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*, 206–7; *PJA*, 1:309–10 (editorial note).

15. See *PJA*, 4:341–51 (the Declaration of Independence), 4:260–302 (the Plan of Treaties), and 8:228–71 (the Massachusetts Constitution, discussed in chap. 6).

16. *PJA*, 1:309–15 (editorial note), and 331 (Samuel Adams's letter of 22? Feb. 1773 to JA); and *D&A*, 3:305.

17. The sources for JA's memory of his role in preparing the two replies to Hutchinson are his autobiography (*D&A*, 3:305–6) and his letter to William Tudor of 8 March 1817 (JA, *Works*, 2:311–13). Curiously, JA's only diary entry on Hutchinson's duel with the legislature (*D&A*, 2:77 [4 Mar. 1773]) makes no mention of his involvement in the affair. Hutchinson later recorded a statement by another Massachusetts Tory that the legislators first tried, without success, to recruit Daniel Dulany of Maryland, and then John Dickinson of Pennsylvania, to help them prepare their first reply, but the Adams Papers editors reasonably question this assertion. They point out that there was scarcely time, between Hutchinson's first message, on 6 January, and the legislators' response, on 26 January, for them to solicit and receive such assistance and compose their text (*PJA*, 1:311). Bailyn, however, accepts this tradition, and characterizes JA's later account of his involvement in the legislature's replies as a "romanticized recollection" (*Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*, 208). For passages and citations in the legislature's second reply to Hutchinson that can confidently be traced to JA, see *PJA*, 1:312–13.

18. Greene, *Colonies to Nation*, 182–85, quotation on p. 185 (excerpted from Bradford, *Speeches of the Governors of Massachusetts*).

19. *PJA*, 1:315–16. The first three paragraphs of the reply show, at most, a moderate influence by JA, as do the last two, but both the content and style of the twenty paragraphs in the body of the text clearly bear his stamp.

20. *PJA*, 1:316–18.

21. *PJA*, 1:318–20 (quotation on p. 318). For JA's very different use, in 1772, of the 1679 law granting a salary to Virginia's governor, see chap. 2, sect. 6, at n. 71.

22. *PJA*, 1:318.

23. *PJA*, 1:324–28 (quotation on p. 328). For JA's quotations from and references to Thomas Hutchinson's *History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts-Bay*, see *PJA*, 1:330nn6, 8, 11, 13, and 14; and 1:346n13.

24. *PJA*, 1:328–29.

25. *PJA*, 1:329.

26. *PJA*, 1:311–12 (editorial note), 332–34 (quotation on p. 334). Hutchinson's speech of 16 February is in Bradford, *Speeches of the Governors of Massachusetts*. He delivered a final message to the House—his parting shot—as he dismissed the members on 6 March (*PJA*, 1:314).

27. *PJA*, 1:335–43 (the quotation from Sandys is on p. 335). On the importance of Calvin's Case in the development of dominion thought, see Charles McIlwain, *The American Revolution: A Constitutional Interpretation* (New York, 1923), 94–95.

28. *PJA*, 1:344 (the reference to Vattel is also on p. 344).

29. JA accurately predicted Hutchinson's difficulty in his diary: "I stand amazed at the Governor, for forcing on this Controversy. He will not be thanked for this. His Ruin and Destruction must spring out of it, either from the Ministry and Parliament on one Hand, or from his Countrymen, on the other." (*D&A*, 2:77 [4 Mar. 1773]). See Brown, *Revolutionary Politics*, 86–91, and Bailyn, *Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*, 208–12.

30. See *PJA*, 1:344 and 346n17.

31. Bailyn, *Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*, 205–6, 207. For the intellectual dynamics of the larger contest between Great Britain and its North American colonies, see Jack P. Greene, *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Polities of the British Empire and the United States, 1607–1788* (Athens, GA, 1986), esp. chaps. 5–7.

32. *The Works of James Wilson*, ed. Robert Green McCloskey (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 2:721–46.

33. *PJA*, 1:312–14 (editorial note); McIlwain, *The American Revolution: A Constitutional Interpretation*, esp. 122–41.

34. *D&A*, 2:79–80, 81; see Bailyn, *Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*, 221–59, and Brown, *Revolutionary Politics*, 143–46, for discussions of the letters controversy. In June, Samuel Adams told the House that copies of the letters from an English source independent of Benjamin Franklin's source were circulating in Boston, whereupon the House decided to publish the letters. Franklin later disputed this claim, saying it was "an expedient to disengage the House" from its pledge of secrecy (Bailyn, 240 and 240n32). In its June session, the House of Representatives also formally condemned the letters and sent a petition to the king, asking that Hutchinson and Lieutenant Governor Andrew Oliver, who had also written some of the letters secured by Franklin, be removed from office (Bailyn, 239–41; Brown, 144). Bailyn claims (p. 239) that JA "took [the letters] with him on the circuit of the superior court [presumably to Middlesex, Plymouth, and Barnstable counties, whose courts met in April and May] to show them to selected non-Bostonians" (see JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:345, for JA's circuit court schedule). This is entirely plausible, but JA makes no mention of showing the letters outside Braintree.

35. *D&A*, 2:82; and see chap. 2, sect. 3.

36. *D&A*, 2:83n, 84–85. On the rejection of nominees for the Council by Governors Bernard and Hutchinson from 1766 through 1773, see Francis G. Walett, "The Massachusetts Council, 1766–1774: The Transformation of a Conservative Institution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 6 (1949): 607–9.

37. For full studies of the Tea Party and the parliamentary statute that preceded it, see Benjamin Woods Labaree, *The Boston Tea Party* (New York, 1964), and Benjamin

Carp, *Defiance of the Patriots: The Boston Tea Party & the Making of America* (New Haven, 2010).

38. *D&A*, 2:85–86; *PJA*, 2:1.

39. On 14 May, the day after General Gage arrived in Boston, when everyone knew of the Port Act, JA assured a British correspondent that "I have very little Connection with public affairs, and I hope to have less" (JA to William Woodfall, 14 May 1774, *PJA*, 2:90). For JA's doubts in June about America's ability to resist Britain, see the quoted text below, at n. 50.

40. *D&A*, 2:87–95; JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:346–47; *PJA*, 2:22–81 (Massachusetts's boundaries). Sometime after 25 April 1774, JA also drafted a brief but spirited attack on Britain's solicitor general, Alexander Wedderburn, and signed it "A Disciple of Dr. Franklin," but did not publish it (*PJA*, 2:85–88). This essay was prompted by Wedderburn's excoriation, at the 29 January session of the Privy Council's Committee on Plantation Affairs, of Benjamin Franklin (who was present), for sending Governor Hutchinson's private letters to Massachusetts.

41. See JA's spirited recollection of his meetings with House leaders in *D&A*, 3:298–302. The Articles of Impeachment, with notes, appear in *PJA*, 2:7–17. Grand jurors first issued a protest against Judge Oliver, who was not present, and endorsed the House of Representatives' decision to impeach him, at a court session in Charlestown, on 7 April (*PJA*, 2:81, 82n).

42. *PJA*, 2:11.

43. *PJA*, 2:13, 14, 17, 10.

44. *PJA*, 2:10, 81, 82n.

45. *D&A*, 2:87–88. For JA's earlier acquisitions of land in Braintree, see chap. 1, sects. 1 and 3, and nn. 3 and 38; and *D&A*, 2:12–13, 15–17, 62–63, and 3:279–80, 286. It is not known when JA moved his family from Boston to Braintree; he was seriously contemplating the move by 12 May (letter to AA, *AFC*, 1:107), just as he was learning of the Boston Port Bill.

46. Bailyn, *Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*, 253–59; *D&A*, 2:96n; *PJA*, 2:96, 128.

47. See excerpts from the two statutes in Greene, *Colonies to Nation*, 207–9.

48. Greene, *Colonies to Nation*, 204–7; Brown, *Revolutionary Politics*, 190, 192–93; Richard Bushman, *King and People* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1985), 186–90, 210, 211. See chap. 4, sect. 1, on provincial Massachusetts's republican character.

49. *PJA*, 2:92 (JA as moderator); *D&A*, 2:96–97n, and *PJA*, 2:98–99 (the selection of congressmen); Brown, *Revolutionary Politics*, 187–95.

50. *D&A*, 2:96 (20 June), 97 (25 June). JA's first day of travel north from Boston to the Essex County court at Ipswich, and then on to Maine, was probably 20 June.

51. The relative political status of Massachusetts's five congressmen is evident from the order in which they were listed in the House journals, irrespective of their honorific titles. Thus, Samuel Adams, who was not a lawyer (commonly designated "Esquire"), was not affluent, and had never risen higher than clerk of the House, had less common social status than Paine or JA, but in the province's politics in 1774 he loomed much larger. See Pauline Maier, *The Old Revolutionaries: Political Lives in the Age of Samuel Adams* (New York, 1980), chap. 1.

52. JA's first work to gain much attention in America outside New England was his *Thoughts on Government* (1776). See *PJA*, 1:104–6, and chap. 1, on republications of the *Dissertation* in England and America into the 1780s. On the attitude of the local populace toward the Boston Massacre trials in 1772, and JA's own attitude toward the trials in 1773, see *D&A*, 2:74, 79.

53. On the historical obscurity of JA's role in the legislature's replies to Hutchinson, see sect. 2, above. JA was, from all evidence, the most learned legal mind in Massachusetts in the early 1770s, with the possible exception of Superior Court judge Edmund Trowbridge. See Daniel R. Coquillette, "Justinian in Braintree: John Adams, Civilian Learning, and Legal Elitism, 1758–1775," in Coquillette, ed., *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, vol. 62, *Law in Colonial Massachusetts, 1630–1800* (Boston, 1984); and *D&A*, 3:301 (JA's own tribute to Trowbridge), and the text at n. 64, below. Of JA's possible supporters in the legislature, he identified the influential Northampton member Joseph Hawley as a particularly close friend in 1773 and 1774 (*D&A*, 3:305 [1773], 300–301 [1774]). He was also fairly close to his cousin, Samuel Adams, throughout this period.

54. *PJA*, 2:92–96, 106–10; Bailyn, *Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*, 265–66; Brown, *Revolutionary Politics*, 215–16, 229–30; and see chap. 4, sect. 1.

55. *D&A*, 2:97–114 (10–29 Aug. 1774). Only four Massachusetts delegates attended the Congress; James Bowdoin had asked to be excused. When JA arrived in Philadelphia he was a stranger to all the delegates from Pennsylvania southward, except for two; he had met Thomas Mifflin of Pennsylvania and Thomas Lynch Sr. of South Carolina the previous summer when they were visiting Massachusetts (*D&A*, 2:84–85).

56. See *D&A*, 2:114–57, and 3:307–15; *PJA*, 2:144–93; *AFC*, 1:141–74; and Worthington C. Ford et al., eds., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789* (Washington, DC, 1904–37), vol. 1, for JA's experiences and service in the First Congress. The most comprehensive studies of the Congress are Edmund Cody Burnett, *The Continental Congress: A Definitive History of the Continental Congress from Its Inception in 1774 to 1789* (New York, 1964), and Jack N. Rakove, *The Beginnings of National Politics: An Interpretive History of the Continental Congress* (New York, 1979).

57. Rakove, *Beginnings of National Politics*, 44–49, 76–78, and 81–82, discusses the role played by the First and Second Continental Congresses in persuading Massachusetts's leaders not to take on all the formal powers of an independent government. As their political and military obligations grew more extensive through the summer and fall of 1775, however, many Massachusetts leaders, including JA, grew increasingly uncomfortable with this restraint (see *PJA*, 3:50, 51n3, 54, and 278). The Suffolk Resolves, written by Dr. Joseph Warren and approved on 9 September by a gathering of delegates from four eastern Massachusetts counties who assembled in Suffolk County, were presented to Congress on 16 September and endorsed by that body the following day. See Rakove, 45–49.

58. Congress's resolutions of 14 October, which were entered without any heading in its *Journals*, were first printed under the title, "The Bill of Rights; and List of Grievances" (*PJA*, 2:159, 163n), but later printings gave it the title "A Declaration of Rights and Grievances." The block quote appears at *PJA*, 2:160–61. In his autobiography (*D&A*, 3:309), Adams remembered taking a broader stand on the proper foundation for colonial rights in Philadelphia than he had in opposing Governor Hutchinson in 1773, when he remarked in Congress that America should base its claims at least partly on natural law, "as a Resource to which We might be driven, by Parliament much sooner than We were aware." McIlwain comments on the importance of Adams's contribution to Congress's "Declaration of Rights and Grievances" in *The American Revolution: A Constitutional Interpretation*, 114–16.

59. *PJA*, 2:161. The Adams Papers editors comment on Adams's role as a compromiser in framing the Declaration's fourth resolve in *PJA*, 2:163n.

60. *D&A*, 2:157.

61. See JA's remark, during deliberations at the First Continental Congress, on the possible necessity of appealing to "the Law of Nature" in the near future (*D&A*, 3:309, quoted in n. 58, above), and his skepticism, as he returned to Massachusetts from Philadelphia a few weeks later, that Britain would respond favorably to the demands of Congress (*D&A*, 2:160 [5 Nov. 1774]).

62. No British colony or possession after Canada received dominion status before 1900. Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa were granted dominion status early in the twentieth century, and these three, plus Canada, were organized with Great Britain into the British Commonwealth of Nations in 1931. In the decades following World War II, nearly fifty British colonies gained their independence and joined a restructured and renamed "Commonwealth of Nations" (without the "British" label), but, even then, their independence was not always complete. Canada did not secure total independence from the British Parliament until 1981.

Although Britain's North American colonists did not explicitly express an awareness of the limitations of dominion autonomy, the delegates to the First Continental Congress may have sensed this when they chose to reject, and then to expunge from their official proceedings, Joseph Galloway's September 1774 Plan of Union. Congress certainly had other reasons for opposing Galloway's Plan, not the least being a distrust of its author, whose prior hostility to Patriot leaders in Pennsylvania and other colonies was well known. But his plan did possess many features that would reappear in the British North American Act of 1867, which created the Dominion of Canada. See Julian P. Boyd, *Anglo-American Union: Joseph Galloway's Plans to Preserve the British Empire, 1774–1788* (Philadelphia, 1941); William H. Nelson, *The American Tory* (Oxford, 1961), chap. 3; and Rakove, *Beginnings of National Politics*, chap. 3.

63. For an effective refutation of the argument that certain radical Patriots, including Samuel Adams, and perhaps JA as well, sought or even secretly desired independence before Lexington and Concord, see Maier, *The Old Revolutionaries*, 21–26.

64. *D&A*, 3:301. In this exchange Trowbridge may have been using "the Constitution" as a synonym for Massachusetts's Charter of 1691, and JA may have been employing the term as shorthand for the British constitution. But it is plausible that both men were using "the Constitution" to refer to both provincial and national organic law. Trowbridge, who had declared, under pressure, that he would not accept a salary from the Crown, was not a Patriot but an unhappy neutral in the conflict with Britain. Estranged from Governor Hutchinson since 1771, he quietly retired to his home in Cambridge in 1774, but without formally resigning his seat on the bench, rather than risk any involvement in the deepening imperial crisis. See *D&A*, 2:38–39, 66, on JA's friendship with Trowbridge; and Sibley-Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, 8:507–20.

Chapter IV. From Imperial Dominion to Autonomous Republic, 1774–1775

Epigraph: PJA, 2:314.

1. *D&A*, 2:158–60.

2. See chap. 3, sect. 3, on Massachusetts's politics in 1773–74, and chap. 1, sect. 4, on JA's *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law*. Mid-eighteenth-century Massachusetts was both figuratively and geographically on the edge of republicanism. Its southern neighbors, Connecticut and Rhode Island, which retained their seventeenth-century corporate charters, elected nearly all their public officials and were, in effect, true republics within a monarchical empire, although they were never called republics. In Sep-

tember 1774, several voices in Massachusetts expressed the wish to restore their colony's early seventeenth-century constitution, commonly called "the Old Charter" (Richard D. Brown, *Revolutionary Politics in Massachusetts: The Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Towns, 1772–1774* [Cambridge, MA, 1970], 231–32).

3. Massachusetts's three native-born eighteenth-century governors, Joseph Dudley (1702–15), Jonathan Belcher (1730–41), and Thomas Hutchinson, were among the most zealous supporters of the Crown. For a good discussion of the structure, issues, and personalities of mid-eighteenth-century Massachusetts politics, see Robert Zemsky, *Merchants, Farmers, and River Gods: An Essay on Eighteenth-Century American Politics* (Boston, 1971). The ubiquity of conflict between royal governors and popular assemblies in the eighteenth-century southern colonies that Jack Greene has chronicled in *The Quest for Power: The Lower Houses of Assembly in the Southern Royal Colonies, 1689–1776* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1963) was just as endemic in Massachusetts and centered on many of the same issues.

4. Bernard Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson* (Cambridge, MA, 1974), chaps. 4–7; Francis G. Walett, "The Massachusetts Council, 1766–1774: The Transformation of a Conservative Institution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 6 (1949): 605–9; Brown, *Revolutionary Politics*, 51–54, 80–81, 99–100, 111, 151–52; *D&A*, 3:298–302; *PJA*, 2:7–17.

5. See Richard D. Brown, "The Massachusetts Convention of Towns, 1768," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 26 (1969): 94–104; and Brown, *Revolutionary Politics*, 102, 172–73, 176 (Brown quotes Braintree's resolve at p. 102). On this date, 1 March 1773, JA was living primarily in Boston and had probably just completed his work on the House of Representatives' second reply to Hutchinson (dated 2 March 1773), but he may have had a hand in preparing Braintree's resolves. Brown also cites a Braintree resolve of 11 March 1774 (p. 173n58). On that date, though JA was still in Boston, he had just purchased his birthplace homestead from his brother and was probably planning on moving back to Braintree soon; and, again, he may have assisted his townsmen in framing their resolutions (see chap. 3, sect. 3). Because several late eighteenth-century American writers, including JA, often used the phrase "the people" to mean the common people, in contrast to the aristocracy (variously defined), I will often have occasion to employ the phrase "the whole people," both as the Lockean basis of constituent power and as a general term for the whole adult free male population of any eighteenth-century American polity.

6. Brown, *Revolutionary Politics*, 226–28 (the 2 September militia rising), and 217–18 (the militia at Worcester).

7. *PJA*, 2:160–61; Richard Bushman, *King and People* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1985), 212–13; Brown, *Revolutionary Politics*, 191, 219. Brown acknowledges that his view of Massachusetts as moving toward a republic in the early 1770s is not new and cites then recent work by Richard Buel Jr. (1964) and Oscar and Mary Handlin (1966), and a much earlier study by Harry A. Cushing (1896), that make this argument in some form (pp. 172n23, 239nn2–4). Bushman also sees Massachusetts as a republic in the fall of 1774 (p. 212), and both Bushman and Brown offer compelling analytical narratives of the collapse of royal government.

8. *D&A*, 2:161n; *PJA*, 2:193–99. JA's draft "Reply to *A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans*" (post 17 Nov. 1774, *PJA*, 2:193–97) was a response to the pamphlet of that title by Thomas Bradbury Chandler, which appeared in New York on 10 November 1774; a 17 November notice in the *Massachusetts Gazette* announced the intention of two local printers to republish it in Boston (*PJA*, 2:196n). Between 1763 and 1767, in 1770

and 1772, and earlier in 1774, JA had drafted many essays that he did not finish or publish. Their texts appear in *D&A*, 1:242–43, 263–99, 349, and 364–65, and 2:53–56; and in *PJA*, 1:81–83, 176–80, and 183–91, and 2:85–88. Several of these pieces drafted in the 1760s are briefly discussed in chap. 1. Here, and on several other occasions in this study, I will capitalize "Independence" to indicate the formal event in July 1776; other uses of "independence" will appear in lower case.

9. *D&A*, 2:96 [20 June 1774] (JA's definition of "Americans"). On the support for Congress by provincial conventions and local officials and committeemen, see David Ammerman, *In the Common Cause* (Charlottesville, VA, 1974), chaps. 3, 6–8; and Richard Alan Ryerson, *The Revolution Is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765–1776* (Philadelphia, 1978), chaps. 4 and 5. William H. Nelson, *The American Tory* (Oxford, 1961), chap. 4, offers a concise discussion of the Tory pamphleteers of 1774–75. On the colonial reprinting of London essays supporting the British ministry, see chap. 1, sect. 5, and n. 78. From this point forward in this chapter, I will use Massachusettensis and Novanglus, without quotation marks, to indicate the authors of these letters, but I will italicize both names when referring to the series that each man produced, whether in fuller or shorter title form (i.e., *Letters of Novanglus* or *Novanglus*).

10. Leonard, five years Adams's junior, lived and practiced law in Taunton, the seat of Bristol County, from 1770 until his acceptance of a commission as a mandamus councilor in August 1774. He then fled to Boston to escape his angry neighbors and remained there until he went into exile in 1776 (*PJA*, 2:217n; Sibley-Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, 14:640–48). In retirement, JA claimed that Governor Hutchinson had alienated from him three of his closest friends, Jonathan Sewall, Samuel Quincy, and Daniel Leonard (chap. 1, sect. 3 and n. 45). In January 1775 it was reasonable for JA to assume that Sewall, not Leonard, was Massachusettensis; Sewall had been the leading Tory pamphleteer in Boston since 1763, while Leonard had steadily supported the Patriots until he voted in the House of Representatives against impeaching Peter Oliver in February 1774. Even then the Patriot leadership did not reject him; he was reelected to the House in May and was appointed, on 9 June, to a committee to consider the threat to the province posed by the Coercive Acts. But his name does not appear in the House *Journals* after that date, and he was probably absent when Governor Gage abruptly prorogued the House immediately following its appointment of delegates to the First Continental Congress (*Journals of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts, 1773–1774* [Boston, 1981], 148, 265). For the first three months of Leonard's residence in Boston (August–October 1774), when he was apparently recruited by the Tories to write for their cause (and when Sewall was also in Boston), JA was in Philadelphia. For JA's persistent belief that Sewall was Massachusettensis, see *PJA*, 2:221–22.

11. JA had employed Grotius and Pufendorf in the Massachusetts House of Representatives' replies to Governor Hutchinson (*PJA*, 1:320, 335, 345) and quoted both writers in *Novanglus*'s sixth letter (*PJA*, 2:289, 291–93). He first mentioned Sidney in his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* in 1765 (*PJA*, 1:127) and then in his diary in December 1769 (*D&A*, 1:347), before quoting him in 1770 in a Boston Massacre trial summation (JA, *Legal Papers*, 3:270). And in 1772 he recorded in his diary (*D&A*, 2:63) a brief, witty epitaph, of uncertain origin, directed at Sidney. In *Novanglus*, JA lists Sidney and other worthies in his first and fifth letters before quoting extensively from him in letter VI (*PJA*, 2:230, 269, 289–91, 293). John Locke also appears on JA's lists of worthies in his *Dissertation* and in *Novanglus*'s letter I, prior to JA's quoting from Locke's *Second Treatise* in letter VI. JA had mentioned Niccolò Machiavelli in his diary in 1760

and 1770 (*D&A*, 1:179, 362), but nowhere again until paraphrasing him in letter I of *Novanglus*, and quoting him in letter IV (*PJA*, 2:232, 267). Harrington earns only brief mentions in JA's *Dissertation* in 1765 (*PJA*, 1:127), in a private letter in 1774 (*PJA*, 2:100), and in letter I of *Novanglus* (*PJA*, 2:230). But JA's quotations from Harrington in letter VII (*PJA*, 2:311–13, 314) are his most extensive in *Novanglus* from any source except for those from Sir Edward Coke's *Reports* in letters VIII, IX, X, and XI, and the unpublished letter XIII.

12. On JA's early purchase of Sidney's *Discourses* and his possibly earlier reading of this work, see chap. 2, sect. 3, and nn. 19–20; on his first quotation from the *Discourses*, see chap. 2, sect. 4, and n. 37. JA does not appear to have owned an edition of any work by Machiavelli before he went to Europe in 1778, and his only references to the Florentine before 1775 do not clearly identify any text. He did own two superb folio editions of James Harrington's collected works (both London, 1747 and 1771), and he signed the first, but he left no record of the date of either purchase (John Adams Collection, Rare Book Room, Boston Public Library). JA's earlier references to Harrington show only the slightest acquaintance with this author and his life (see especially *PJA*, 2:100 and 100n).

In the second chapter of *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), on the "Sources and Traditions" of America's Revolutionary pamphleteers, Bernard Bailyn provides a valuable context for JA's political reading and writing and makes two larger points that relate to JA's citations and quotations. First, political theorists of the English, Scottish, and continental Enlightenments and early modern English authorities on law appear in a wide range of American Revolutionary pamphlets. Second, although Americans cited an impressive array of British and European writers, they often displayed the most superficial understanding of those authors' ideas. But while many Americans quoted Sidney, and nearly all quoted or at least cited Locke, few ever quoted or even cited Harrington, and it would appear that none except JA cited or quoted from any work of Machiavelli besides *The Prince* (C. Bradley Thompson, "John Adams's Machiavellian Moment," *Review of Politics*, 57 [1995]: 389–417). JA's extensive and accurate quotations in *Novanglus* from all four writers demonstrate an unusual degree of familiarity with their ideas. The extraordinary breadth of JA's knowledge of legal authors is the theme of Daniel Coquillette's "Justinian in Braintree: John Adams, Civilian Learning, and Legal Elitism, 1758–1775," in Coquillette, ed., *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, vol. 62, *Law in Colonial Massachusetts, 1630–1800* (Boston, 1984); see chap. 1, at n. 99.

13. Of the four titles listed here, only the contents of JA's *Letters to the Boston Patriot* were never intended to address a single large subject, but none of these works were composed with much thought given to their overall structure. JA's most effective and tightly constructed works were among his shortest; his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* and his series of "Clarendon" and "Winthrop" letters each take up less than 16 printed pages in the Adams Papers (at 500 words per page; *PJA*, vol. 1), and his elegant *Thoughts on Government* is only 9 pages long. His series of essays "On the Independence of the Judges" (40 pages), and the Massachusetts House of Representatives' two replies to Governor Hutchinson (totaling 25 pages), which was largely his, presented more extended but quite coherent arguments. Three later works written and published in Europe in the early 1780s were also well defined and ranged from 25 to just over 50 pages. The pamphlet edition of his political correspondence with Samuel Adams in 1790 was even shorter. The *Letters of Novanglus*, however, ran to roughly 150 pages. His *Discourses*

on Davila was of a similar length. Only JA's three-volume *Defence of the Constitutions*, which ran to over 1,000 pages, was significantly longer. Of JA's four longest works, *Novanglus*, *Discourses on Davila*, and *Letters to the Boston Patriot* were first published serially in newspapers; JA had no intention of publishing them in book form; and both the *Novanglus* and *Davila* series were abruptly terminated, the former by Lexington and Concord, the latter for personal reasons. For publishing data on pieces written through 1780, see the editorial notes in *PJA*, vols. 1, 2, 4, 9, and 10; and the discussions in chaps. 1 and 3, in the present chapter, and in chaps. 5 and 7. Chapters 8 through 10 will assess JA's works written after 1785.

14. JA explicitly refers to Massachusettensis's letters in all but two of his published *Novanglus* letters; only letters II and XI make no direct reference to his antagonist. He devotes letter II entirely to a counterattack against Massachusetts's Tories in response to the attack on the province's Patriot leadership in Massachusettensis's third letter and continues this polemic in letters IV and V. In his earlier *Novanglus* essays, JA refers to Massachusettensis's first six letters (published between 12 December 1774 and 16 January 1775) by their number but does not discuss them in order. In the later letters he continues to respond to Massachusettensis's arguments, but seldom identifies his antagonist's letters by number, and does not refer to any Massachusettensis letter after number 6, published on 16 January 1775. For Novanglus's explicit references to Massachusettensis's letters, see *PJA*, 2:226, 233n, 243, 246, 255n, 256, 268n, 269, 287n, 293–94, 307, 326n, 328, 346, 355, 362, 373, 376, 380, 384, and 385. Novanglus also directly quotes Massachusettensis at dozens of other points in his essays; most of these passages are not editorially noted in *PJA*, except where Novanglus appears to alter or distort Massachusettensis's text (see *PJA*, 327nn 16, 17, and 20).

15. Because the *Boston Gazette* split JA's letter VIII into two pieces and printed them on successive Mondays, his *Novanglus* letters first appeared in thirteen installments. In the present work, for convenience, I refer to JA's letters signed "Novanglus" either as the *Letters of Novanglus* or simply as *Novanglus*, but no complete edition of *Novanglus* appeared until well after the Revolution, in 1819. Up to that date the letters were known only from original newspaper publications and from two quite incomplete editions in English (London, 1775, 1784) and one in Dutch (Amsterdam, 1782) (see *PJA*, 2:223–25 [editorial note]). In the discussion that follows, references to the essays will be to their original headings, either in roman numerals or as "first letter," "second letter," etc.

16. *PJA*, 2:226–55 (letters I–III); 256–87 (letters IV–V); 226–33 (letter I). *A Letter from a Veteran, to the Officers Encamped at Boston*, by Robert Prescott, appeared in New York in 1774 (*PJA*, 2:230, 233). JA's mention of Chandler's *A Friendly Address* is at *PJA*, 2:231; for his incomplete draft response to Chandler's pamphlet, see *PJA*, 2:193–97; and sec. 2, at n. 8, above.

17. *PJA*, 2:228–29, 232.

18. *PJA*, 2:230 (both block quotations). JA was almost certainly not prepared in 1775 to discuss the teachings of all seven of his authorities on "revolution-principles." When he considered this large subject at greater length while preparing his magnum opus, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*, in 1786 and 1787, he would conclude that Plato was hardly an advocate of revolution-principles, but he would retain his full admiration for the other six authors (see chap. 8).

19. Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, published, with his *First Treatise*, in 1690, was often seen as justifying the Glorious Revolution of 1688–89, but it was probably composed as early as 1681–82 (*ODNB*, 34:216–28, esp. p. 222).

20. *PJA*, 2:233–41; Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, esp. chaps. 3 and 4, and "A Note on Conspiracy."

21. *PJA*, 2:243–55.

22. *PJA*, 2:256, 258–62, 263 (quotation).

23. *PJA*, 2:268.

24. *PJA*, 2:269.

25. *PJA*, 2:270–83, 287 (quotation).

26. *PJA*, 2:288, 289–90, 291. JA's personal copy of Grotius's *On the Law of War and Peace* (*De Jure Belli ac Pacis*) was a 1738 London edition entitled *On the Rights of War and Peace*; he quotes from book 1, chap. 3, sects. 1 and 2. His personal copy of Sidney's *Discourses* was published in Edinburgh in 1750; he quotes from chap. 2, sect. 24, pp. 172, 173, 174–75, and 176 (the italics in the block quotation are JA's). His personal copy of Locke's *Second Treatise* was published in London in 1740; he quotes from chap. 18, sect. 209. All these volumes are in JA's library at the Boston Public Library.

27. *PJA*, 2:294–304.

28. See *PJA*, 2:268, quoted at n. 23, above.

29. *PJA*, 2:307, 309–10, 326.

30. *PJA*, 2:310–14 (block quotation on p. 314). For an appreciation of JA's early questioning of the title "British Empire," see David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), 195–96.

31. *PJA*, 2:313. Hutchinson's remark in January 1773 is at *PJA*, 1:328; see chap. 3, sect. 2.

32. *PJA*, 2:314–15. See *PJA*, 1:160, and chap. 1, sect. 5, on JA's "Clarendon" letters. In letter VII, Novanglus characterized just three European powers as empires, "the German, or Holy Roman, the Russian and the Ottoman" (p. 315). JA gives no reason for characterizing the Holy Roman Empire, which by the 1770s had become an increasingly hollow confederation of autonomous German-speaking autocratic states just three decades short of its demise, as a major arbitrary power.

33. *PJA*, 2:311, 313, 326nn3 and 4. JA quotes from pp. 43 and 44 of James Harrington, *The Oceana and Other Works, Collected . . . by John Tolland . . .* , 3d ed. (London, 1747), his personal copy, now in the Boston Public Library. The reality of Roman colonization, of course (and perhaps of Turkish colonization as well), was more complex than this, but JA quotes Harrington accurately and undoubtedly regarded him as authoritative on this subject.

34. See *PJA*, 4:87 (*Thoughts on Government*), where JA uses the phrase "an empire of laws, and not of men"; and *PJA*, 8:242 (*Report of a Constitution*, chap. 2, "The Frame of Government"), where he states: "In the government of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the legislative, executive, and judicial power shall be placed in separate departments, to the end it might be a government of laws, and not of men."

35. *PJA*, 2:315–26.

36. JA's hints, in the legislature's two replies of 1773 to Governor Hutchinson, that the English settlers' claim to Massachusetts was superior to that of Charles I, in part because they had purchased their land from native Americans, are at *PJA*, 1:317, 333, and 338.

37. *PJA*, 2:328.

38. See *PJA*, 2:329, where JA denies that the British North American colonies were ever annexed to the realm of either England or Great Britain.

39. *PJA*, 2:327 (on the common law) and 328 (quoted at n. 37, above). JA's novel thesis directly attacked a major strand of the cord that bound Britain's North American

colonies to it: the right of the Privy Council, upon the recommendation of the Board of Trade, to disallow any law passed by a colonial legislature.

40. Novanglus uses Latin most extensively in the second part of letter VIII and in letters X and XI; see especially *PJA*, 2:339, 340, 357, 358, 365, and 369 (including translations for each passage).

41. See especially *PJA*, 2:337–45 (on Wales) and 355–62 (on Ireland); and *PJA*, 2:343–44 (block quote).

42. *PJA*, 2:346 (on Galloway); 2:346–49.

43. *PJA*, 2:350–51, 351, 354.

44. *PJA*, 2:355–63 (letter X), 363–72 (letter XI), 373–80 (letter XII); 379, 380 (quotations). JA completed one more Novanglus letter and sent it to the printers on the morning of 19 April, but Lexington and Concord interrupted the publication of the *Boston Gazette*. This essay was not published for over two centuries, and no intact draft survives. In 1977 the Adams editors constructed an apparently complete text of the essay from surviving materials, with full annotation (*PJA*, 2:380–87). In this relatively brief "letter XIII," JA explores the legal character of the Massachusetts Bay charter of 1629 and concludes that once it came to America with the first settlers, it had no authoritative status either under English law or in relation to English law, but was simply a compact between the settlers. In a passage that somewhat undercuts JA's concluding sentence in letter XII (quoted in the text at this note number), he recounts the attempts by royal officials, who in the late 1630s realized their error in allowing the charter to be taken to America, to force the settlers to return it. But as they were unsuccessful, he concludes that the original settlers had no obligation to pay any attention to English law. One must also remember that JA would have regarded the legal status of the 1629 charter as moot after it had been superseded by the royal Charter of 1691. And because most of the settlers who agreed, explicitly or tacitly, to abide by the new royal charter had been born out of England, JA was convinced that they had agreed to live under that charter on a strictly voluntary basis.

45. *PJA*, 2:221, 223–25 (editorial note).

46. *PJA*, 2:217–21 (editorial summary of Massachusettensis's argument). The Adams editors ventured the opinion that Massachusettensis's letters were more effective than those of Novanglus, in part because they were written in a simpler, less erudite style (p. 219). This contention may be correct, but it would, in the opinion of this writer, be quite impossible to prove, and in any event Massachusettensis had little hope of converting many Patriots to his views. In the present study, the author has chosen to ignore the question of whether JA was more or less persuasive than his journalistic opponents in swaying his immediate audience, for two reasons. In most cases, there is little or no evidence to determine whether JA or a given antagonist gained the advantage. More important, the question is largely beside the point in a study whose principal objective is to elucidate JA's thought, not to rate his polemical success or lack thereof. The reader will note that in chapters 1 and 3 the focus has also been almost exclusively on JA's arguments. JA's earlier opponents, especially Jonathan Sewall in the 1760s and Governor Thomas Hutchinson in the early 1770s, were as interesting and worthy as Daniel Leonard, but again, their relative success cannot be accurately determined and is generally irrelevant to the evolution of JA's political thought.

47. In two respects, the character of much of JA's written work changes in and after 1776. Before that date, neither publication data nor corroborating evidence can establish how large his readership was, either in relation to the readership of his journalistic antagonists or in absolute numbers. From 1776 on, however, details of publication and

other evidence sometimes give a rough idea of who was reading his work (and, by the early 1780s, in what languages). Second, while it is difficult to show a specific impact of any essay that he wrote before 1776, the effect, whether positive or negative, of several of his pieces from 1776 through the 1790s is somewhat clearer from the testimony of several sources.

48. In letter VIII, where Novanglus argues that the bond between the monarch and each colony is voluntary, he implies that the bond or contract is broken if either the colonists terminate their freely given allegiance to the king or the king terminates his pledge to protect them. From the colonists' perspective, this is exactly what George III did in 1775 and 1776. From his perspective, the colonists had illegally terminated their allegiance to him by allying under the two Continental Congresses and then taking up arms against his army and navy. The crucial difference between JA's and Britain's view of the imperial bond was whether it was voluntary. JA evidently thought that George III had a right to withdraw his protection from the colonies but not to attempt to force them to remain in the British Empire. George III, of course, thought the colonists had no right to withdraw their allegiance.

49. Of the many interesting and informative works on Lexington and Concord, David Hackett Fischer's *Paul Revere's Ride* (New York, 1994) is the definitive study of the battle, the immediate preparations for it by both sides, and its immediate aftermath. In his autobiography, JA remembers riding from Cambridge to Lexington along the battle road to examine the scene and talk to local residents, and remarked: "These [accounts of the battle] were not calculated to diminish my Ardour in the Cause. They on the Contrary convinced me that the Die was cast, the Rubicon passed, and as Lord Mansfield expressed it in Parliament [but speaking of the British need to resist the Americans], if We did not defend ourselves they would kill Us" (*D&A*, 3:314).

50. See JA's brief descriptions of the impact of Lexington and Concord on New York City in JA to AA, 30 April, and 2 and 8 May 1775, *AFC*, 1:189, 191, 195; similar descriptions of the event's impact on pacific Philadelphia in JA to Isaac Smith, 7 June, and to AA, 10 June 1775, *AFC*, 1:212–13, and 213–14; and the extended analyses of the transformation of Philadelphia in Ryerson, *Revolution Is Now Begun*, chaps. 6 and 8; and Steven Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class: The Philadelphia Militia and the "Lower Sort" during the American Revolution* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1987).

51. See York, "Rival Truths," *Massachusetts Historical Review*, 11 (2009): 57–95; and chap. 2, sect. 4.

52. Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, 220–60. Fischer points out (p. 220) that it was at Merriam's Corner that the gathering Patriot militia forces probably outnumbered the British regulars for the first time that day.

53. On Samuel Adams's exclamation, see Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, 183.

54. JA's *Letters of Novanglus* was the longest published political discourse by any American Patriot writer until his own *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*, written in 1786 and 1787, and Hamilton's, Madison's and Jay's *Federalist Papers*, written in 1787 and 1788.

55. These were, of course, just two of the major questions that faced the American colonies in 1775–76, but they were the two that most compellingly commanded JA's intellectual attention in that year. He did not, however, ignore three other pressing questions: Could the American colonies—and then states—defend themselves against the military forces of Great Britain? Could and should the separate American states unite in one strong confederation? Could an independent America defend and advance its interests in its relations with foreign nations? JA unhesitatingly answered each of these

questions in the affirmative, and he would devote much of his time in 1776 and 1777, as president of Congress's Board of War, to ensuring America's military success, and most of the decade 1778–88 to defending America's interests abroad. Only the matter of national confederation received less than his full attention in Congress. But JA was one of America's most ardent nationalists from 1776 until his death. He strongly supported the drafting of the Articles of Confederation in 1776–77; he thought the federal Constitution was a great improvement on the articles; and on many occasions he would place what he regarded as America's national interests ahead of Massachusetts's particular concerns.

56. *PJA*, 4:87.

Chapter V. Building a Republican Orthodoxy, 1775–1776

Epigraph: PJA, 4:87.

1. *JCC*, 3:319. In early December, Congress also advised Virginians to reform their government; see n. 12, below.

2. JA records his thoughts and activities from May through December 1775 in great detail in *D&A*, 2:161–226, and 3:314–59; *PJA*, 3:1–390; *AFC*, 1:190–339; and in *JCC*, vols. 2 and 3. His diary and Congress's *Journals* supply the dates of his departures from and arrivals in Massachusetts and Philadelphia, in April, May, August, September, and December 1775, and of his attendance at Congress throughout this period.

3. JA to a Friend in London, 21 Jan., and 10 Feb. 1775, *PJA*, 2:214–16, 391–93; *D&A*, 3:351; James Warren to JA, 7 May 1775, *PJA*, 3:3, 4, 5–6n.

4. On 9 June, the Continental Congress advised the Third Provincial Congress of Massachusetts that it had no obligation to respect the Massachusetts Government Act and should immediately call an election for a new House of Representatives, which could then select a Council and declare the office of governor vacant (*JCC*, 2:83–84). See also JA to James Warren, 20 June, to Joseph Warren, 21 June, and to James Warren, 27 June, *PJA*, 3:34, 44, 50, and 51n3; and *D&A*, 3:351–54. On 20 June, Massachusetts's Provincial Congress voted to call an election for a new House of Representatives, and that legislature convened in Watertown, Massachusetts, on 19 July (James Warren to JA, 20 June, and 20 July 1775, *PJA*, 3:38, 39n6, 82, 84n3). The Charter of 1691, whose status had been unclear since the arrival of the Massachusetts Government Act in Boston in June 1774, was restored to its full vitality, without alteration, from July 1775 until the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 (largely written by JA in 1779) went into effect in October 1780. When the House of Representatives elected the full complement of twenty-eight men to the Council on 21 July, it named its five delegates to Congress—John Hancock, Thomas Cushing, Samuel Adams, Robert Treat Paine, and JA—to that body (*Journal of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts, 1775, Part I* [Boston, 1982], 6). For JA's appointment as chief justice of the province's new Superior Court, see below in this section and sect. 2; *D&A*, 3:359n; JA to AA, 15 Nov. 1775, *AFC*, 1:327–28, and 328n2; and JA to Perez Morton, 24 Nov. 1775, *PJA*, 3:314–15. For modern commentary on Massachusetts's new government, see Richard D. Brown, *Revolutionary Politics in Massachusetts: The Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Towns, 1772–1774* (Cambridge, MA, 1970), chap. 10; and Richard Bushman, *King and People* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1985), chap. 6.

5. Congress's conciliatory petition to the king, of 8 July 1775 (*JCC*, 2:162–71), was written by the moderate John Dickinson and signed by all the members of Congress, although several delegates, including JA, thought it to be a useless gesture (JA to

James Warren, 11 July 1775, *PJA*, 3:71–72). The colonial secretary, Lord Dartmouth, received the petition on 1 September, but George III ignored it. On 23 August, the king had declared all the colonies that sent delegates to Congress to be in rebellion, but news of his declaration did not reach North America until early November (Joseph Palmer to JA, 31 Oct. and 7 Nov. 1775, *PJA*, 3:265, 266n5). On the rapid collapse of royal government from New Hampshire to Georgia in the summer and fall of 1775, see chap. 6, sect. 2.

6. On 15 November 1775, JA first recorded learning that, without his knowledge or approval, several of his *Novanglus* letters had recently been republished in John Almon's *Remembrancer* in London, their first appearance outside New England (JA to AA, *AFC*, 1:326, 327n2; see *PJA*, 2:223–24 [editorial note]). This publication probably reached America too late to influence JA's congressional colleagues in 1775; it may have contributed to his reputation as a constitutional thinker by March 1776, when he was composing the letters that led to his *Thoughts on Government* (see sect. 2, below).

7. JA describes his ill health and ailing eyes, and the treatments he sought from Dr. Thomas Young and Dr. Benjamin Church during Congress's spring–summer session, in letters to his wife (JA to AA, 29 May, 10 June [two letters], 7 July 1775, *AFC*, 1:207, 213, 214, 243).

8. New Hampshire's delegates presented their petition to Congress on 18 October. Debate on the issue began at once and continued irregularly, amid other pressing business, until 26 October, when Congress named a committee, consisting of John Rutledge, JA, Samuel Ward, Richard Henry Lee, and Roger Sherman, to report a resolve. The committee presented its report on 3 November, and Congress adopted its resolution the same day (*JCC*, 3:298, 307, 319 [quotation]; *D&A*, 2:209–20; 3:354, 356–57; and *PJA*, 3:141).

9. Several colonies had worked cooperatively on earlier occasions, most notably at the Albany Congress in 1754, and the Stamp Act Congress in 1765, but those efforts did not result in long-term alliances bound by solemn obligations. For Massachusetts's republicanism of 1772–73, see chap. 3, sects. 1–3, and Brown, *Revolutionary Politics*, chap. 5. On JA's oration at Braintree, see chap. 2, sect. 6.

10. The only substantive source for this debate is JA's narrative in his autobiography; his diary for the period summarizes or excerpts other congressional debates, but not this one (*D&A*, 3:352, 354–57; 2:209–20). But despite the passage of three decades, JA's memory appears reliable, and as I have done before (see chap. 2, sect. 4, and chap. 3, sect. 2), I will assume that his account of events is essentially accurate whenever there is no contradictory evidence. A brief passage in a letter from New Hampshire's congressmen John Langdon and Josiah Bartlett to Matthew Thornton, of 3 November 1775, which accompanied Congress's resolve of that date, confirms JA's dramatic portrayal of the debate (*Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774–1789*, ed. Paul H. Smith [Washington, DC, 1977], 2:292–93). JA first voiced his doubts that America could stay in the British Empire in a letter to Moses Gill on 10 June 1775 (*PJA*, 3:21) and repeated his skepticism several times in 1775 and early 1776. On the point at which certain Patriot leaders first favored independence, see sect. 3, below. And see JA to William Heath, 15 April 1776, for his appreciation of the popular basis of effective government.

11. On 30 September, Congress appointed a delegation to travel to Massachusetts and confer with General Washington and representatives of the four New England colonies to determine "the most effectual method of continuing, supporting, and

regulating a continental army" (*JCC*, 3:265, 266–67). The delegation arrived at Cambridge on 15 October. See JA to James Warren, 30 Sept., William Heath to JA, 23 Oct.1775, *PJA*, 3:172, 173n3, 230.

12. Congress's response to South Carolina's petition appears in *JCC*, 3:319; JA supplies a few details in *D&A*, 3:352, 354, 357 (quotation), and 358. On JA's anachronistic use of "State" in describing events of 1775, see the text at n. 15, below. On 4 December 1775, Congress, after learning that Governor Dunmore had declared martial law in Virginia, also advised that colony to reform its government, but local leaders ignored this advice until the spring (see chap. 6, n. 18).

13. *D&A*, 3:358.

14. *D&A*, 3:358. Abbé Sieyès, a leader in France's first National Assembly in 1789, appears in Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*.

15. *D&A*, 3:357.

16. *PJA*, 3:307–8 (quotations on p. 307).

17. *PJA*, 3:308, 308n5.

18. *PJA*, 3:307.

19. *D&A*, 2:223–24; 3:350, 359, and 359nn3 and 4. During his month in Massachusetts, JA would be too occupied with both provincial and congressional business in Watertown and Cambridge to spend much time in his library (see sect. 2, below), but he did take a few short breaks in Braintree and might also have taken a few republican volumes with him to Philadelphia.

20. See James Warren to JA, 20 Oct., and JA to James Otis Sr., 23 Nov. 1775 (*PJA*, 3:222, 224n20, 313), on the dispute between the House and the Council over a militia bill. For JA's arrival in Massachusetts, his service on the Council, and his departure for Congress, see *PJA*, 3:377–88, and *D&A*, 2:227.

21. *PJA*, 3:378 (editorial note), 407. The legislators chose their congressional delegation on 15 December 1775, electing Hancock unanimously, and casting 124 of 129 votes for Samuel Adams. Paine received only 65 votes, the bare minimum for reelection. Tension between both Paine and Cushing, on the one side, and Hancock and the two Adamses on the other, had been building for several weeks; see *PJA*, 3:293, 317, 348–49, 375, 391–92, 415–17.

22. *PJA*, 3:378, 380, 383–88 (quotation from p. 383). No indication of the date of JA's decision to accept his reelection to Congress survives; 18 January 1776 was the date on which the legislature issued its formal notification of their election, and its instructions, to the five delegates. For evidence that the January proclamation was fundamentally JA's creation, see the annotation at *PJA*, 3:387–88.

23. *PJA*, 3:384–86 (quotations on p. 386).

24. William Cushing, who ended his long judicial career on the U.S. Supreme Court, had served on Massachusetts's Superior Court since the early 1770s and was the only member of that bench to accept appointment to the Superior Court under the Revolutionary provincial government. His former colleagues either went into exile or retired following the announcement of the Coercive Acts. On Cushing's appointment to the new Superior Court in October 1775, see *PJA*, 3:218, 223n4, and JA to Cushing, 9 June 1776, *PJA*, 4:244–46.

25. *AFC*, 2:159n; *PJA*, 4:152n, 183; 5:79–80, 116–17 (on JA's gradual decision to resign the office of chief justice); *PJA*, 2:405 (quotation).

26. JA sent copies of *Common Sense* to his wife, Abigail, to his Braintree neighbor, General Joseph Palmer, and possibly to other Massachusetts friends (*AFC*, 1:348, 350;

PJA, 4:37); and see *PJA*, 4:41, 45, 50, 53, and 55, for friends of JA who, between 29 February and 15 March 1776, acknowledged having secured a copy of the pamphlet, without stating their source.

27. On JA's work in Congress from February to August 1776, see *PJA*, 4:1–20; and Jack N. Rakove, *The Beginnings of National Politics: An Interpretive History of the Continental Congress* (New York, 1979), chaps. 4 and 5.

28. John Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (Knoxville, TN, 1992), 143 (on *Common Sense*); *AFC*, 1:363 (quotation). Largely on the basis of this letter to Abigail, *Thoughts on Government* has often been characterized as a reply to the constitutional ideas expressed in *Common Sense*. In effect, *Thoughts* was a reply to Paine's ideas on government, but JA would almost certainly not have written it if he had not been asked to do so by his congressional colleagues.

29. Catherine II rejected Britain's request for Russian mercenaries in September 1775. Congress heard rumors of Britain's quest for German mercenaries as early as October 1775, but news of the concluded contracts, and of the numbers of German troops destined for America, did not reach Boston until late April and Philadelphia in early May 1776 (*PJA*, 3:177; 4:155–56; Richard Alan Ryerson, *The Revolution Is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765–1776* [Philadelphia, 1978]), 208, and n. 5). JA's correspondents at *PJA*, 4:37, 41, 45, 50, 53, 55, and *AFC*, 1:352, 354, testify to the enormous appeal of *Common Sense* in Massachusetts in February and March.

30. See Willi Paul Adams, *The First American Constitutions: Republican Ideology and the Making of the State Constitutions in the Revolutionary Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1980); and chap. 6, sects. 2 and 3.

31. See the comprehensive editorial note to *Thoughts on Government* in *PJA*, 4:65–73, which describes the circumstances of each letter's composition, briefly compares the texts, and traces the influence of the individual letters and of the published *Thoughts on Government* on several state constitutions from 1776 to 1790. The Adams editors print and annotate JA's letters to Hooper and Penn, as well as the text of the pamphlet, at *PJA*, 4:73–93.

32. See sect. 1, above, on the congressional debates over colonial constitutions, and JA's 15 November 1775 letter to Lee.

33. Compare the texts at *PJA*, 3:307–8 (1775 letter to Lee); *D&A*, 3:354–57 (JA's account of his remarks in Congress); *PJA*, 4:86–93 (*Thoughts on Government*); and *PJA*, 8:236–61 (JA's draft of the Massachusetts Constitution).

34. The development of JA's views on the different roles of a legislative council or senate, and a governor's council, appear in *PJA*, 3:307 (letter to Lee), 4:76, 77 (letter to Hooper), 4:81, 82 (letter to Penn), 4:89, 90 (*Thoughts on Government*), and 8:242–47, 254–55 (draft of the Massachusetts Constitution). JA's first criticism of the new federal Constitution, focusing on the powers of the Senate, appears in his letter to Thomas Jefferson of 6 December 1787 (*PTJ*, 12:396).

35. *PJA*, 3:307, 308; 4:74, 77, 84, 89, 90, and 92.

36. On JA's authorship of Congress's 15 May Preamble, see sect. 3, below.

37. *PJA*, 4:74. JA's "two Branches of their Legislative" were the royal governor, who could veto any bill passed by the House and Council, and the Council itself. But his characterization of the Council as "always in the Hands of the Crown" was quite misleading. The councilors were nominated by the House and were usually accepted by the governor until 1766, when the Council began to join the House in opposition to British policy. Thereafter, Governors Bernard, Hutchinson, and Gage did reject several

councilors nominated by the House but never enough to regain control of that body. See chap. 3, n. 36; and chap. 4, sect. 1, on the Council; the text at n. 48, below, on the importance of education; and chap. 3, sects. 1–3, and chap. 4, sect. 1, on the growth of a republican political culture in Massachusetts.

38. *PJA*, 4:86; the couplet is from Pope's *Essay on Man*, 3:303–4.

39. *PJA*, 4:86–87.

40. *PJA*, 4:87. Briefer expressions of this republican legacy appear in the Hooper and Penn letters (*PJA*, 4:74, 79–80). In his letter to Hooper, JA said, "In my early Youth, the Works of Sidney, Harrington, Lock, Milton, Nedham, Neville, Burnet, [and] Hoadley, were put in my Hands," but as we have seen in chaps. 2–4, this can hardly be true. JA might have read Sidney's *Discourses* and Locke's *Second Treatise* while still in his twenties, but other republican authors came later, some perhaps as late as 1775.

41. *PJA*, 4:87. On the "inexhaustible variety" of republics, see JA's 1772 oration at Braintree, discussed in chap. 2, sect. 6. In his draft of the Massachusetts Constitution, JA would employ an electorate qualified solely by the property of individuals to choose the governor, and an electorate defined by both individual property holdings and place of residence in districts (essentially counties) for choosing senators, and in towns for choosing representatives. In his defining of the electorate for the senate, JA acknowledged the principle of representation based on the aggregate holding of property in each district (see chap. 6, sect. 4). Beginning in September 1776 in Pennsylvania, several states would move entirely to an electorate based on age, gender, and either the payment of taxes or military service, with no requirement for holding property. For good discussions of the relationship of representation to property, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1969), chap. 6, sect. 4, and chap. 12, sect. 4.

42. In the two-plus centuries since the American Revolution, the concept of a qualifying interest for voting has grown to include all adult white males, counted equally, regardless of place of residence, which JA criticized in 1776 (JA to James Sullivan, 26 May 1776, in *PJA*, 4:208–13); then free blacks; then all males, regardless of race or previous servitude; then women, first in the states and territories, and then nationally; and most recently, young adults, age 18 to 20. The treatment of all voters equally was not achieved in law until federal judicial rulings establishing an effective "one man, one vote" rule, regardless of residence in urban or rural districts (and is, of course, still diminished by the electoral structure of the U.S. Senate).

43. *PJA*, 4:87–88.

44. *PJA*, 4:89. The printed text of *Thoughts* has "distant Assembly," an obvious printer's error, as JA's use of "distinct Assembly" in the following paragraph (p. 89) shows. In the 1780s, however, many Americans, especially in Massachusetts during Shays's Rebellion, would come to see JA's Senate as a "distant Assembly," remote from their needs and interests. In *Creation of the American Republic*, 579, Gordon Wood highlights JA's identification of the role of mediator with the upper house in *Thoughts* and contrasts it with his view in the 1780s, when he made the executive the mediator, or balance, between the people and the aristocracy; see the opening of the introduction to this book.

45. *PJA*, 4:89–90. The couplet is from Pope's *Essay on Man*, 3:19–20. JA's reference to Connecticut, both here and later in *Thoughts*, and his admiration for Connecticut's energetic support of the rebellion in a letter to William Heath of 15 April (*PJA*, 4:119),

suggests that he had an unusually high regard for the government of that colony. His first recorded notice of the political culture of Connecticut was in 1771; see chap. 2, sect. 6.

46. *PJA*, 4:90. Several Middle Atlantic and southern states instituted rotation in office in the 1770s, but it was never adopted in New England. JA did not include rotation in his draft of the Massachusetts Constitution in 1779. He would first decisively reject term limits when discussing the office of president under the federal Constitution, in his letter to Thomas Jefferson, of 6 December 1787 (*PTJ*, 12:396).

47. *PJA*, 4:91. See the discussion of JA's essay series "On the Independence of the Judges," Jan.–Feb. 1773, in chap. 3, sect. 1. The phrase "independent upon both," in this passage, occasionally crops up in other writings of the Revolutionary era; it simply means "independent of both."

48. *PJA*, 4:91. On the importance of publicly supported education in a free government, see the discussion of JA's *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law*, chap. 1, sect. 4.

49. *PJA*, 4:92.

50. *PJA*, 4:92. JA's phrase, "the unappropriated lands of the Crown, as they used to be called," clearly presumes independence from Great Britain.

51. *PJA*, 4:92–93. See chap. 6, sect. 4, on JA as a sole lawgiver in 1779. JA's authorship of *Thoughts on Government* was not revealed until May 1777, by Benjamin Rush (*PJA*, 4:69). JA quotes, quite inaccurately, the opening stanza of John Milton's sonnet XII (c. 1645), a defense of his controversial writings on divorce.

52. *PJA*, 4:68 (editorial note); JA to James Warren, 20 Apr. 1776, *PJA*, 4:130–32; Adams, *First American Constitutions*.

53. Julian Boyd argued that George Mason, an architect of Virginia's Constitution of 1776, was influenced both by JA's November 1775 letter to R. H. Lee and by his *Thoughts on Government*. *Thoughts* also prompted a sharp response by Virginia's conservative congressman Carter Braxton, but his *Address to the Convention of the Colony and Ancient Dominion of Virginia* (Philadelphia, 1776) evidently had little impact in Williamsburg (*PJA*, 4:70 [editorial note]). The extent of JA's influence on the New Jersey Constitution of 1776 might be clearer if his letter to Jonathan Dickinson Sergeant, which was a longer and, in JA's view, a superior version of *Thoughts*, had survived (*PJA*, 4:65–68).

54. D&A, 3:359.

55. JA to James Warren, 20 Apr., and 12 May 1776, *PJA*, 4:131–32, 182 (on designing *Thoughts on Government* for southern colonies); *Thoughts on Government*, *PJA*, 4:89 (on Connecticut).

56. See chap. 1, sect. 4 (*Dissertation*), and 6 ("Clarendon"); chap. 2, sect. 6 (oration at Braintree); chap. 3, sect. 1 (Independence of the Judges); and chap. 4, sect. 3 (the sixth and seventh letters of *Novanglus*).

57. See chap. 3, sect. 2 (the replies to Hutchinson).

58. Ryerson, *Revolution Is Now Begun*, chap. 9.

59. Pauline Maier, *The Old Revolutionaries: Political Lives in the Age of Samuel Adams* (New York, 1980), 21–26.

60. JA to Moses Gill, 10 June 1775, *PJA*, 3:20–21.

61. On JA's involvement in Pennsylvania politics, see Ryerson, *Revolution Is Now Begun*, chap. 9. On his political activities in Holland, see chap. 7; *PJA*, vols. 10–13; J. W. Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence* (Chapel Hill, NC,

1982); and Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780–1813* (New York, 1977).

62. See Ryerson, *Revolution Is Now Begun*, chaps. 7 and 9, which also trace the political activities of Samuel Adams and Thomas McKean in 1776.

63. On the Pennsylvania Assembly and its resemblance to other relatively small and coastal-dominated legislatures, such as those of New York and both North and South Carolina, see Ryerson, *Revolution Is Now Begun*, chap. 1, and "Portrait of a Colonial Oligarchy: The Quaker Elite in the Pennsylvania Assembly, 1729–1776," in Bruce C. Daniels, ed., *Power and Status: Officeholding in Colonial America* (Middletown, CT, 1986), 106–35, 295–300; and Jack P. Greene, "Legislative Turnover in British America, 1696 to 1775: A Quantitative Analysis," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 38 (1981):442–63. On the expansion of the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1776, see *Revolution Is Now Begun*, 160–66, 171–74. On both JA's and Samuel Adams's close identification with Philadelphia's Revolutionaries, see the comic verse that connects them (as "Adam's sons") with five local radicals (Thomas Paine, Dr. Thomas Young, Christopher Marshall, James Cannon, and Benjamin Rush), which appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 27 Mar. 1776 (quoted in *Revolution Is Now Begun*, 170).

64. The texts for both the Resolution and the subsequent Preamble are taken from their first publication, together, in a broadside issued by John Dunlop, the principal printer of Congress. The broadside is reproduced as an illustration in *PJA*, 4:185. See sect. 1, above, for the text of Congress's 3 November 1775 response to New Hampshire; and Ryerson, *Revolution Is Now Begun*, 212, for Dickinson's response to the 10 May 1776 resolve.

65. See *PJA*, 4:11–12n1, on JA's relation to the Preamble and the Resolve; the broadside reproduced at *PJA*, 4:185, is the source of the Preamble text quoted here.

66. JA to James Warren, 15 May, and 20 May 1776, *PJA*, 4:186–87, 195–97.

67. Ryerson, *Revolution Is Now Begun*, 208, 211–28.

68. Ronald Hoffman, *A Spirit of Dissention: Economics, Politics, and the Revolution in Maryland* (Baltimore, 1973); Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760–1790* (Baltimore, 1981).

69. *JCC*, vol. 4. See Rakove, *Beginnings of National Politics*, 99–100; and Ferling, *John Adams*, 150, for the epithet "Atlas of American Independence," which Congressman Richard Stockton gave JA after hearing his 1 July speech.

70. On the Adams-Lee alliance in 1774–76, and in 1778–81, see Rakove, *Beginnings of National Politics*, 42, 101–3, and chap. 11. In *AFC*, 4:155n1, the Adams editors record the "witty saying without a known author to the effect that the American Revolution was the result of a temporary alliance between the Adamses and the Lees." My thanks to Jeremy Dibbell, reference librarian at the Massachusetts Historical Society, for drawing my attention to this citation.

71. See John Dickinson's "Arguments against the Independence of the Colonies" (1 July 1776), *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 65 (1941): 468–81. JA's second letter of 3 July 1776 to Abigail, in which he predicted the celebration of American Independence on 2 July, is in *AFC*, 2:29–33.

72. JA's published writings before Independence make no reference to the political writings of Virginia's Richard Bland or Thomas Jefferson, or Pennsylvania's James Wilson, or even of Boston's James Otis Jr. and Josiah Quincy Jr. See *PJA*, vols. 1–4; and chaps. 1–4.

73. See sect. 1, above. The vivid phrase, "the logic of rebellion," is from Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), chap. 4.

Chapter VI. Defending Executive Authority, 1775–1780

Epigraph: PJA, 8:276.

1. JA emphasizes the distinct role of the people in government as voters and jurors in his third "Clarendon" essay, of 27 January 1766 (*PJA*, 1:167, 168). For the origins and development of the theory of a tripartite division of government in medieval and early modern England, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 71n15, citing Corinne C. Weston, *English Constitutional Theory and the House of Lords, 1556–1832* (London, 1965). The tripartite division of both government and society, which in one form or another informed the Western political tradition from ancient Greece to the eighteenth century, must be distinguished from the American tripartite division of government into the executive, legislative, and judicial branches that emerged from the Revolution. Ironically, this latter triad, enshrined in the federal Constitution in 1787, received its first graphically articulated statement in JA's *Report of a Constitution for . . . Massachusetts* in 1779 (see sect. 4, below).

2. The classic narrative of the growing gap between the political thought of JA and that of his countrymen from the late 1770s until his death is Gordon S. Wood, *Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1969), chap. 14: "The Relevance and Irrelevance of John Adams."

3. This disinterested "capacity" of the monarchy was clear enough in theory, but in practice many British monarchs openly supported one or another economic interest or social class, and were often widely seen to be doing so. But JA, in his brief definitions of Britain's supreme executive, virtually never addressed this reality. See *Letters of Novanglus*, letters VIII–XII, and chap. 4, sect. 3, on JA's conception of the bond between British Americans and the person of the king. Many colonials who either visited or resided for some time in Britain were eager to attend Court and be presented to the king, but such an event was just one of several attractions in the metropolis. New Englanders—and Virginians—were less likely to visit Britain than most other British Americans, whose enthusiasm for long stays in Britain, whether for education, business, or pleasure, increased fairly steadily as their residence in America extended southward. Many affluent South Carolinians and British West Indians spent years in the metropolis, a behavioral pattern that was virtually unknown among New Englanders of any social class. See Julie Flavell, "Decadents Abroad: Reconstructing the Typical Colonial American in London in the Late Colonial Period," in Leonard J. Sadosky et al., eds., *Old World, New World: America and Europe in the Age of Jefferson* (Charlottesville, VA, 2010), 32–60.

4. "Clarendon," 27 Jan. 1766, *PJA*, 1:168; oration at Braintree, May 1772, *D&A*, 2:57; *Letters of Novanglus*, letter VII, 6 Mar. 1775, *PJA*, 2:314; JA to Timothy Pickering, 6 Aug. 1822, in JA, *Works*, 2:512–14 (quotation on p. 514). JA's impersonal attitude toward the executive does not appear to have been a variant of the traditional notion that the king—in distinction to his ministers—"can do no wrong." JA thought that George III had taken wrong measures in dealing with America, but the principal feature of the traditional belief that "the king can do no wrong" that JA did not share was any deep veneration for the monarch.

5. *A Committee Report of a Constitution . . . for Massachusetts* (Oct. 1779), *PJA*, 8:242, 249. Contrast JA's simple label and title for Massachusetts's governor in 1779 with his deep concern, in 1789, that the president of the United States be given a more elevated title (chap. 9, sect. 1).

6. "Clarendon," 27 Jan. 1766, *PJA*, 1:167.

7. JA's oration at Braintree, May 1772, *D&A*, 2:57; JA in Congress, June and Oct. 1775, *D&A*, 3:354, 356. JA's statement of the position he held in June 1775 would be clarified by placing a comma after "Council" to emphasize "the three Branches of a Legislature"; see the quoted text at n. 15, below.

8. JA to Richard Henry Lee, 15 Nov. 1775, *PJA*, 3:307; *Thoughts on Government*, *PJA*, 4:89. See John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, book II, chap. xiii, sects. 151 and 152, on the relationship of the executive to the legislative power; and Richard Bushman, *King and People* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1985), esp. 53–54, 88–96, on the monarch's relationship to Massachusetts's legislature and people.

9. In 1782, George III's only alternative to accepting American independence was abdication, which he seriously considered; any royal opposition to Parliament's decision to end hostilities in America would have no constitutional effect (*ODNB*, 21:840). On the role of royal patronage in both parliamentary elections and the routine management of Parliament, the classic study is Louis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (London, 1929).

10. The legislatures of Pennsylvania and Delaware were unicameral (their shared governor's council had no legislative power); legislatures in all the other rebelling colonies were bicameral until 1776. The Calvert family (the Lords Baltimore) appointed the governors of Maryland; the Penn family named the governor of both Pennsylvania and Delaware. Connecticut and Rhode Island chose their own chief executives. The Crown appointed all the other governors. On the formal mechanisms tying the colonies to Britain, see Leonard W. Labaree, *Royal Government in America: A Study of the British Colonial System before 1783* (New Haven, CT, 1930); and Jack P. Greene, *The Quest for Power: The Lower Houses of Assembly in the Southern Royal Colonies, 1689–1776* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1963).

11. The concept of the *separation of powers*, to which the great majority of American political leaders, political scientists, and historians have at least paid lip service since 1776, will be critically assessed in sects. 4 and 5, below, and in chap. 9. The more central element of America's republican governments has been *checks and balances*, a quite different concept. As president, George Washington was as cool toward a strict separation of powers as JA. See Jack Warren, "In the Shadow of Washington: John Adams as Vice President," in Richard Alan Ryerson, ed., *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic* (Boston, 2001), 126–27, and nn. 27 and 40; on this point, Warren (n. 27) cites Glenn A. Phelps, *George Washington and American Constitutionalism* (Lawrence, KS, 1993).

12. See Greene, *The Quest for Power*; and Bernard Bailyn, *The Origins of American Politics* (New York, 1968).

13. On the collapse of Governor Gage's authority, see chap. 4, sect. 1. See also Jere R. Daniell, *Experiment in Republicanism: New Hampshire Politics and the American Revolution, 1741–1794* (Cambridge, MA, 1965); Willi Paul Adams, *The First American Constitutions: Republican Ideology and the Making of the State Constitutions in the Revolutionary Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1980), 29 (on Rhode Island); and Richard Buel Jr., *Dear Liberty: Connecticut's Mobilization for the Revolutionary War* (Middletown, CT, 1980).

14. Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760–1790* (Baltimore, 1981); Larry R. Gerlach, *Prologue to Independence: New Jersey in the Coming of the American Revolution* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1976); Sheila Skemp, *William Franklin: Son of a Patriot, Servant of a King* (New York, 1990); Richard Alan Ryerson, *The Revolution Is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of*

Philadelphia, 1765–1776 (Philadelphia, 1978); Ronald Hoffman, *A Spirit of Dissention: Economics, Politics, and the Revolution in Maryland* (Baltimore, 1973); John E. Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia, 1775–1783* (Williamsburg, VA, 1988); Michael A. McDonnell, *The Politics of War: Race, Class, and Conflict in Revolutionary Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007); Wayne E. Lee, *Crowds and Soldiers in Revolutionary North Carolina: The Culture of Violence in Riot and War* (Gainesville, FL, 2001); Robert M. Weir, *"A Most Important Epoch": The Coming of the Revolution in South Carolina* (Columbia, SC, 1970); and Leslie Hall, *Land & Allegiance in Revolutionary Georgia* (Athens, GA, 2001).

15. *D&A*, 3:356; see n. 7, above. The clarifying comma suggested in n. 7 is added to the quoted text here in brackets.

16. *D&A*, 3:351–52.

17. *D&A*, 3:358.

18. *D&A*, 3:358. On 4 Dec. 1775, Congress also recommended that Virginia reform its government after its royal governor declared martial law, but that province did not act on the recommendation until the spring of 1776 (Adams, *First American Constitutions*, 59). It is not known what role JA may have played in that recommendation, but he was still in Congress on that date.

19. On the constitutions of New Hampshire and South Carolina, see Adams, *First American Constitutions*, 68–72.

20. See chap. 5, sect. 2.

21. See chap. 5, sect. 2; Adams, *First American Constitutions*, 81–82 (North Carolina), 72–73 (Virginia), 73–74 (New Jersey), and 80–81 (Maryland).

22. On JA's congressional work from June 1776 through November 1777, see *PJA*, vols. 4 and 5, esp. 4:252–59 (the Board of War), 4:260–302 (The Plan of Treaties), and 5:58–63 (JA's service in Congress, Jan.–Nov. 1777).

23. See Adams, *First American Constitutions*, 82–83 (Georgia) and 76–80 (Pennsylvania); chap. 5, sect. 3; and sects. 3 and 4, below in this chapter. JA first reported the decision of Pennsylvania's constitutional convention to establish a unicameral legislature in a 16 August 1776 letter to Francis Dana, in which he stoutly reaffirmed his commitment to bicameralism (*PJA*, 4:466). But he did not refer again to Pennsylvania's constitution until 4 June 1777, in his letter to AA (*AFC*, 2:255). Dr. Benjamin Rush, JA's good friend and an admirer of *Thoughts on Government*, publicly revealed JA's authorship of the pamphlet, which had been known to several congressional and Massachusetts friends for over a year, in the *Pennsylvania Journal*, 28 May 1777 (*PJA*, 4:69).

24. Adams, *First American Constitutions*, 37, 42–43, 47.

25. Adams, *First American Constitutions*, 83–86, 268, 270.

26. Adams, *First American Constitutions*, chap. 3, summarizes the constitutional activity of all the colonies/states, as well as Vermont, in 1776 and 1777.

27. The basic literature on Massachusetts's political transformation from 1774 through 1780 is extensive and of high quality. Important analytical narratives and collections of sources include Harry A. Cushing, *History of the Transition from Provincial to Commonwealth Government in Massachusetts* (New York, 1896); Robert J. Taylor, *Western Massachusetts in the Revolution* (Providence, RI, 1954); Robert J. Taylor, ed., *Massachusetts, Colony to Commonwealth: Documents on the Formation of Its Constitution, 1775–1780* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1961); Oscar Handlin and Mary F. Handlin, eds., *The Popular Sources of Political Authority: Documents on the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780* (Cambridge, MA, 1966); Richard D. Brown, *Revolutionary Politics in Massachusetts: The Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Towns, 1772–1774* (Cambridge, MA, 1970); Stephen E. Patterson, *Political Parties in Revolutionary Massachusetts* (Madison, WI,

1973); L. Kinvin Wroth et al., eds., *Province in Rebellion: A Documentary History of the Founding of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1774–1775* (Cambridge, MA, 1975); Bushman, *King and People* (1985); and several shorter works by Samuel Eliot Morison cited in the notes below.

28. William H. Nelson, *The American Tory* (Oxford, 1961), chaps. 1, 2, and 5; Robert M. Calhoon, *The Loyalists in Revolutionary America, 1760–1781* (New York, 1973).

29. See Edward M. Cook Jr., *The Fathers of the Towns: Leadership and Community Structure in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Baltimore, 1976), chaps. 6 and 8; Brown, *Revolutionary Politics*, chaps. 2, 8–10; Countryman, *A People in Revolution*; Ryerson, *Revolution Is Now Begun*, esp. chaps. 4 and 8.

30. In accordance with the 1691 royal charter, every member of the new House of Representatives elected in 1775 represented the people of an organized town, just as the members had done in 1774, and the qualifications for voting were unchanged. The new Council had twenty-eight members who represented four unequal regions of the province, just as the councilors had in 1774. The only departure from the process of forming a government set out in the Charter lay in selecting the Council's members. Because the Patriots did not recognize the province's only sitting Council (the royal mandamus Council) in the summer of 1775, the twenty-eight new Council members were nominated by the new House alone, rather than by the incoming House and the retiring Council. And because the House did not recognize the governor, its nominations were final, rather than subject to a gubernatorial negative. In May 1776, the old nomination process for the Council was restored, but never again would a Massachusetts governor negative a nomination to the Council.

One more feature of the new Revolutionary government was also new. On 3 May 1776, just one week before the legislature adjourned, the House of Representatives hastily passed a bill that granted additional delegates to the more populous towns. The Council concurred, and in the new House that convened in late May, Boston now had not four but twelve members; several larger commercial towns elected not two but four or more delegates; and many large agricultural towns that had chosen just one member now elected two, three, or even more. See Patterson, *Political Parties*, 143–44, 154–55.

On JA's early pride in Massachusetts, see his *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* (1765); on his insistence that Massachusetts be an exemplary model to the other states in the War for Independence, see his letters of 3 Feb. (1st letter), 19 June, and 18 Aug. 1777, to James Warren (*PJA*, 5:74, 226, 275).

31. See Buel, *Dear Liberty*; John P. Kaminski, *George Clinton: Yeoman Politician of the New Republic* (Madison, WI, 1993); and Carl E. Prince, *William Livingston, New Jersey's First Governor* (Trenton, 1976).

32. See Samuel Eliot Morison, *A History of the Constitution of Massachusetts* (Boston, 1917); Morison, "The Vote of Massachusetts on Summoning a Constitutional Convention, 1776–1916," MHS, *Proceedings* 50 (Apr. 1917): 241–49; Ellen E. Brennan, *Plural Office Holding in Massachusetts, 1760–1780: Its Relation to the "Separation" of Departments of Government* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1945); Taylor, *Western Massachusetts in the Revolution*, esp. chap. 5; and Patterson, *Political Parties*, esp. chaps. 4 and 5.

33. See chap. 5, sect. 2, on JA's probable authorship of the proclamation of January 1776; Taylor, *Western Massachusetts in the Revolution*; chap. 5; and Patterson, *Political Parties*, esp. chaps. 4, 5, and 8.

34. James Warren to JA, 7 May, 20 June, and 20 July 1775 (*PJA*, 3:4, 38, 82).

35. JA to James Warren, 27 June 1775 (*PJA*, 3:50). For JA's general thoughts on local government in 1775, see his letters to James Warren of 20 June, and 6 July 1775, and to Joseph Palmer, 5 [July] 1775 (*PJA*, 3:34, 62, 54).

36. AA to JA, 31 Mar. and 5 Apr. 1776 (one letter) (*AFC*, 1:369–71). AA was mistaken in assuming that the soon to be independent states were expecting Congress to write a new body of laws for them, or that Congress had any wish to do so. Yet her impatience for Congress to declare independence and her sense that Americans in every state were looking to Congress for leadership were widely shared feelings, and JA was keenly aware of them. See his reply to AA, cited in n. 37, below.

37. JA to William Heath, 15 Apr. (*PJA*, 4:119–20); to AA, 14 Apr. (*AFC*, 1:381–83); to James Warren, 22 Apr. (*PJA*, 4:135–37 [long quote on p. 136]. Two aspects of JA's exhortation of 22 April deserve a brief comment. His suggestion that the General Court might "Send a Petition to Philadelphia for the Consent of Congress" to alter Massachusetts's constitution, just as it had in May 1775, seems puzzling. But the General Court had not issued instructions to its congressional delegation to support independence, and JA may have thought the lawmakers needed a little extra prodding. His statement that a move by Massachusetts to alter its government at any point in the fall of 1775 ("Four months ago," that is, before mid-December) "might have been disagreeable and perhaps dangerous" could indicate that he still thought it better for colonial unity, as he had since 1774, for Massachusetts to follow the lead of other colonies in political matters to avoid appearing either arrogant or too radical.

38. JA to James Warren, 12 May 1776 (*PJA*, 4:181–83); to Francis Dana, to John Lowell, and to David Sewall, all 12 June (*PJA*, 4:248–52); to William Tudor, 24 June (*PJA*, 4:335–36); to Samuel Cooper, 10 July (*PJA*, 4:375–76); and to Francis Dana, 16 Aug. 1776 (*PJA*, 4:465–67). JA learned of the legislature's first steps toward constitutional reform from Dana's letter of 28 July 1776 (*PJA*, 4:414–17). For the adjournment of the 1775–76 General Court, and the convening of its successor, see *Journals of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts*, vol. 51, pt. 3 (Boston, 1984), and vol. 52, pt. 1 (Boston, 1985).

39. *Journals of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts*, vol. 52, pt. 1 (Boston, 1985), 13, 16, 18, and vol. 52, pt. 2 (Boston, 1986), 110; Handlin and Handlin, *Popular Sources*, 153 (Concord's resolutions of 22 Oct. 1776); Taylor, *Western Massachusetts in the Revolution*, chap. 5; Patterson, *Political Parties*, chaps. 6 and 7; and Morison, "The Votes of Massachusetts on Summoning a Constitutional Convention," MHS, *Proceedings* 50 (1917): 243. The town of Norton also favored a constitutional convention (Handlin and Handlin, 124–25 [7 Oct. 1776]).

40. See Patterson, *Political Parties*, chap. 7. Texts of the Constitution of 1778 and the Essex Result appear in Handlin and Handlin, *Popular Sources*, 190–201 and 324–65, and Taylor, *Colony to Commonwealth*, 51–58, and 73–89 (excerpted). The Reverend William Gordon, chaplain of the House of Representatives and soon to be one of the first historians of the American Revolution, also opposed the Constitution of 1778 and even charged that it was deliberately made defective so that it would be defeated (Morison, *History of the Constitution*, 16; Gordon's essays in Boston's *Continental Journal* and the *Independent Chronicle* in Apr. 1778, see *PJA*, 6:190n).

41. *Journals of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts*, vol. 54 (Boston, 1989), 147, 150; *D&A*, 2:400n. Nearly one hundred towns reported majorities for holding a constitutional convention; majorities in nearly forty towns opposed the plan (Handlin and Handlin, *Popular Sources*, 389–93; Patterson, *Political Parties*, 212–14).

42. JA's attendance at Congress and his travels back and forth between Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Maryland in 1776 and 1777 are recorded in *D&A*, 2:227–29, 251, 252, 257, and 267–69; *PJA*, 4:1; 5:53, 58, 74–75, and 331; and *AFC*, 2:144–45. There is no evidence that JA took any part in state government during his 1776–77 break from Congress, or in the three months of the following winter, between his resignation from Congress and his departure for Europe.

43. JA's letter of 26 May 1776 to James Sullivan is at *PJA*, 4:208–13. As a strong believer in the traditional argument that the possession of some property was necessary to ensure a voter's independence, JA was and remained a conservative on the franchise issue (see also JA to James Warren, 7 July 1777, *PJA*, 5:242; Timothy H. Breen, "John Adams' Fight against Innovation in the New England Constitution, 1776," *New England Quarterly* 40, no. 4 [Dec. 1967]: 501–20; chap. 7, below, which will explore the implications of JA's argument in this letter; and chap. 10, sect. 7, for his opposition to expanding the franchise in 1820).

44. See JA's correspondence of 1777 with Warren, cited in n. 48, below, and Nathan Rice to JA, 10 Dec. 1777 (*PJA*, 5:354–56).

45. Thomas Cushing to JA, 9 June (Adams Papers, MHS; not printed in *PJA*), and James Warren to JA, 7 June 1778; JA to Cushing, 25 July, and to Warren, 26 July 1778 (*PJA*, 6:187–90, 315–16, 320–22).

46. See Patterson, *Political Parties*, chaps. 5–8. Patterson (pp. 216–17) sees "four distinct political forces" in Massachusetts from 1776 to 1779. Two were divisive, nascent political parties: the more radical centered in the rural central and western counties; the more conservative centered in the coastal mercantile counties. Two other forces were cohesive: the Hancockites (devoted to electing John Hancock as governor under any new constitution); and "the Adams men." This last group was the smallest but "proved to have remarkable influence. Their strength lay in their skill with the pen, their mastery of political theory, and their stolid self-righteousness." Their members, whom Patterson does not itemize, included at a minimum James Bowdoin, James Warren, and Samuel and John Adams.

47. JA to Warren, 12 May 1776 (*PJA*, 4:182).

48. JA to Warren, 3 [May], 11 June, and 7 July 1777 (*PJA*, 5:173–75, 220–22, 242–43; quotes on pp. 174, 221, and 242); and JA to Warren, 26 July 1778 (*PJA*, 6:320–22).

49. On JA's service in France in 1778 and 1779, see *PJA*, vols. 6–8; *AFC*, vol. 3; and chap. 7. He arrived in Massachusetts on or about 3 August and was elected a Braintree delegate to the convention on 9 August (*PJA*, 8:103, 121; *D&A*, 2:400n). On his election to the convention's drafting committee, and then to its subcommittee, see *PJA*, 8:229–30.

50. See chap. 5, sects. 1 and 2, on JA's service on the Massachusetts Council in 1775–76. He resigned the office of chief justice in February 1777 (*PJA*, 5:79–80).

51. JA's only stated ambition, while on his first mission in Europe, was to return to his law practice in Massachusetts (*PJA*, 6:318–19).

52. The printed *Report* submitted to the full convention could have included substantial passages written by JA's committee colleagues James Bowdoin and Samuel Adams, to whom JA first showed his handiwork. But with the exception of Article III of the Declaration of Rights (discussed later in this section), and in the absence of counterevidence, one must accept JA's later testimony (from 1812), that Bowdoin and Samuel Adams suggested only the alteration of a line or two (see *PJA*, 8:230 [editorial note]). The full drafting committee could also have made substantial changes in JA's text, but JA, who is again our only source, mentions just one confirmed change by the full com-

mittee (also discussed below), which he regarded as both important and unfortunate (JA to Elbridge Gerry, 4 Nov. 1779, *PJA*, 8:276–77).

53. The era of the American Revolution has left evidence of just a few sole lawgivers—men entrusted with drafting virtually the entire text of a constitution—in addition to JA in 1779. The most prominent were George Mason, who composed Virginia's Bill of Rights in May–June 1776, and JA's congressional rival, John Dickinson, who drafted the Articles of Confederation for Congress in June–July 1776. (One should note that neither James Madison nor any other Framer at Philadelphia in 1787 acted as a sole lawgiver at that convention.) While the authorship of a constitution by one man was relatively rare in the eighteenth century, the ancient tradition of the sole lawgiver, part mythical and part historical, which JA knew well, included the celebrated Lycurgus in eighth-century BCE Sparta and Solon in sixth-century BCE Athens. Nothing certain is known about how early Greek lawgivers composed their texts—or even exactly what those texts were—but the received tradition of Solon's reforms recounted the unceasing demands by his fellow citizens that he explain his work. Solon responded by leaving Athens for a decade following the promulgation of his laws, about the same length of time as JA's unplanned second diplomatic sojourn in Europe (1779–88). See Plutarch, *Solon*, xxv.4–5 (*Plutarch's Lives*, ed. and trans. Bernadotte Perrin, 1:474–77, Loeb Classical Library [Cambridge, MA, 1982]).

54. JA confirms the identity of his political friends and rivals in Massachusetts in several statements in his private correspondence from 1776 through 1779; see especially JA to James Warren, 12 May 1776, and 7 July 1777 (*PJA*, 4:182, and 5:242), on his preferences for governor and his dislike of John Hancock. In addition to Bowdoin, Warren, and Samuel Adams, who were about a decade senior to JA, one could add his younger friends Francis Dana and Elbridge Gerry, although they had only recently begun their careers in Massachusetts politics.

55. For the texts of these charters and constitutions, see Francis N. Thorpe, ed., *The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws of the . . . United States of America*, 7 vols. (Washington, DC, 1909), vol. 3. The Charter of 1691 also appears in the *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, vol. 2, *Collections* (Boston, 1913), 7–29. The Constitution of 1778 appears both in Handlin and Handlin, *Popular Sources*, 190–201, and Taylor, *Colony to Commonwealth*, 51–58. The only modern annotated text of Adams's draft, the *Report of a Constitution* first published in 1779, appears in *PJA*, 8:228–71, edited primarily by Robert J. Taylor and the present author.

56. Brown, *Revolutionary Politics*, 8–14, and 242, makes effective use of the annual election-day sermons given by an appointed minister each year in late May in the provincial capital, at the election of a new Council.

57. *PJA*, 8:261–62n6 (JA's sources for "Commonwealth"); *PJA*, 4:397, 466 (his endorsement of the term in July and August 1776). JA was still in Massachusetts on 9 November, when a delegate proposed to change the state's name, but his correspondence suggests that he was at home in Braintree, not at the convention in Cambridge, after 4 November (*PJA*, 8:276–83). Although "Commonwealth" was not used in official Massachusetts documents before JA's draft *Report* in October 1779, it evidently had some popular currency in the state; see Elizabeth Smith Shaw to AA, 10 Jan. 1777 (*AFC*, 2:382).

58. On the original meaning of *commonwealth* and the related *common weal*, see *OED*, 3:573–74. The four American states that style themselves commonwealths are Virginia (1776), Pennsylvania (1776), Massachusetts (1780), and Kentucky (1792).

59. *PJA*, 8:237.

60. *PJA*, 8:237–38.

61. *PJA*, 8:238–42. For objections to the 1778 constitution's lack of a bill of rights, see Patterson, *Political Parties*, 190; and Handlin and Handlin, *Popular Sources*, 302, 312, and 324.

62. See the annotation to the Declaration's articles in *PJA*, 8:262–64 (nn. 8–35). In the articles the total number of passages drawn from each of the following sources are the bills of rights of Pennsylvania, 14; of Maryland, 13; of Virginia, 9; of Delaware, 5; England's Bill of Rights, 5; and Magna Carta, 3. The English statute *Talliago non concedeno* (1297), the Petition of Right, John Locke's *Second Treatise*, and the Declaration of Independence each contributed just one article or clause. Despite his impressive list of sources, JA evidently composed the Declaration of Rights rapidly, with little attention to detail. Several of his articles are wordy and repetitious, and on the basis of the order in which they appear in the *Report*, he evidently proceeded through Pennsylvania's sixteen articles, copying many passages verbatim and ignoring only two articles, while paying less attention to those written in Virginia, Delaware, and Maryland, before going through Maryland's longer list of articles, again with little attention to other sources, and then tackling Virginia's and Delaware's articles. This largely accounts for the lack of any apparent organization in the Declaration.

63. *PJA*, 8:238. On JA's religious beliefs, see chap. 1, sect. 1; chap. 10, sect. 7; and C. Bradley Thompson, *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty* (Lawrence, KS, 1998), chap. 1.

64. *PJA*, 8:238. Although there is no proof that Samuel Adams wrote Article III, the circumstantial evidence is fairly strong. The article had been composed by the time the drafting committee submitted the first section of the *Report* to the convention on 28 Oct. 1779 (see *PJA*, 8:261n1, and 271n140), and Samuel Adams, as a member of the three-man drafting subcommittee, would have had ample time to compose it.

65. Samuel Eliot Morison, in "The Struggle over the Adoption of the Constitution of Massachusetts, 1780," MHS, *Proceedings* 50 (May 1917): 353–411, calculated the ratification vote for the several articles of the new constitution and concluded that Article III had failed to receive the required support of two-thirds of the voters (see pp. 368–81, 396–401, 411).

66. *PJA*, 8:242–61 (text of the Frame of Government). Many of the notes at 8:264–71, detail the convention's alterations to the Frame.

67. *PJA*, 8:242, and see n. 37 (p. 264); *PJA*, 2:314 (quoted and discussed in chap. 4, sect. 3).

68. See sect. 1, at n. 11, above, on the separation of powers.

69. *PJA*, 8:242; JA to Gerry, 4 Nov. 1779 (*PJA*, 8:276). JA wrote in response to Gerry's letter of 12 Oct. (*PJA*, 8:197–99). Gerry had heard, from some unspecified source, that JA planned to advocate an absolute veto for the governor and urged him to limit such a veto to "proceedings [that might] affect the powers of the Executive," advice that JA ignored. See also JA to Benjamin Rush, 4 Nov. 1779 (*PJA*, 8:279).

70. *PJA*, 8:242, and n. 40 (p. 265); and 232 (editorial note). The constitution for the state of New York, approved in 1777, was the first to provide the executive, in a more restricted fashion than in Massachusetts's constitution, with a veto that could be overridden by the legislature (see sect. 2, at nn. 24 and 25, above).

71. Because this italicized article is conjectural, the order given here—Senate, House of Representatives, and Governor, following the order of these elements in the *Report's* Frame of Government—could easily have been different.

72. *PJA*, 8:276 (block quote). See sect. 3, above (especially at nn. 38 and 47), for JA's relatively relaxed attitude toward executive power in Massachusetts in 1776 and 1777.

73. On the constitutional ideas of Parsons, Bowdoin, and Warren, see Patterson, *Political Parties*, chaps. 7 and 8.

74. *PJA*, 8:244.

75. *PJA*, 8:244 (Senate districts), 246, 248 (property qualification for senators, representatives, and voters). The *Report* gave the most commercial counties, Essex and Suffolk (including Boston), six members each; Middlesex and Worcester, more rural counties, each chose five; and Hampshire (the Connecticut River valley) chose four. Plymouth and Bristol chose three each, and six other counties located on the peripheries of the Commonwealth, in the Berkshire Hills, on Cape Cod and the islands, or in Maine, chose just one or two. This distribution of senators was roughly proportional to the distribution of councilors under the Charter of 1691, which awarded eighteen seats to the original Massachusetts Bay colony, four to the old Plymouth Colony, and four to the eastern district of Maine, leaving just two seats to be filled at large (*Publications of the Colonial Society*, vol. 2, *Collections*, 20). JA may have adopted the high property qualifications for officeholders from Article III of the rejected Constitution of 1778, which, like the *Report*, required the governor to have an estate of £1,000, and set an even higher bar for senators and representatives: £400 for the Senate, and £200 for the House, rather than £300 and £100 (Handlin and Handlin, *Popular Sources*, 192).

76. *PJA*, 8:244 (Senate), 247–48 (House), 255 (Council).

77. *PJA*, 8:245, 248. For a comparison of Massachusetts's franchise with those of other states in the Revolutionary era, see Adams, *First American Constitutions*, 293–307. In evaluating JA's franchise, it may be helpful to think of three concepts of *the people* that enjoyed some currency in Massachusetts in 1779. Arranged in concentric circles, they are the regular electorate, defined by gender, age, and property holdings; the constituent population, usually all freemen over the age of twenty-one, which elected the members of Massachusetts's constitutional convention and would vote on the finished Constitution; and the whole people, which could, depending on a particular writer's or speaker's political objectives or philosophy of government, include slaves, women, and children, all of whom were thought to be represented, in some fashion, by delegates whom they were never allowed to elect (see JA to AA, 14 Apr. 1776, *AFC*, 1:381–83). This subject will be considered at some length in the following chapter.

78. *PJA*, 8:242, 249–53.

79. *PJA*, 8:254–55; compare the election and composition of this new Council with the old Charter Council (*Publications of the Colonial Society*, vol. 2, *Collections*, 20). The nine senators chosen for the Council were not replaced by additional elections, so the Senate stayed at thirty-one members though the year, and several counties were represented by fewer senators than they had originally elected, but presumably they gained some compensating influence or power by having one of their representatives on the Council. JA could have taken the idea of separating executive and legislative functions between a governor's council and a senate from Theophilus Parsons's "Essex Result," which also called for both a council and a senate (Handlin and Handlin, *Popular Sources*, 359), but the evidence for his own commitment to this concept, without any outside influences, seems more persuasive (see n. 80, below).

80. See JA to Thomas Jefferson, 6 Dec. 1787 (*PTJ*, 12:396); and chap. 8. In explaining to Jefferson his reservations about the new federal Constitution, JA took an even stronger position in favor of executive authority than he had in 1779: "The Nomination

and Appointment to all offices I would have given to the President, assisted only by a Privy Council of his own Creation; but not a Vote or Voice would I have given to the Senate or any Senator unless he were of the privy council."

81. In 1840, the thirteenth amendment to the Massachusetts constitution provided that the nine councilors continue to be chosen by the General Court, but from among the people rather than from the ranks of the Senate, which thereafter has always enjoyed its full complement of forty seats. In 1855, the Commonwealth's sixteenth amendment provided for the popular election of eight councilors from individual districts, a practice that continues to this day. See *The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Boston, 1981), 42, 43, 99, 100.

82. *PJA*, 8:256–57. JA or a committee colleague may have relabeled the provincial Superior Court the Supreme Judicial Court to avoid confusion with the Great and General Court, which remained the title of Massachusetts's bicameral legislature.

83. *PJA*, 8:260.

84. *PJA*, 1:127.

85. See JA to William D. Williamson, 25 Feb. 1812, cited in *PJA*, 8:230; and n. 93, below. JA's provision for rotation in office for the governor (*PJA*, 8:253, chap. III, sect. I, art. XIV) was also rejected by the convention.

86. An incomplete copy of the *Report* was printed in London in April 1780; in June the full *Report* appeared in London, and (in French) in Holland. The convention's completed text of the Constitution of 1780 was published in England, France, and Holland in the fall of 1780. See *PJA*, 8:236 (editorial note), 378–80; 9:136, 138, 443, 445–46; and 10:151, 152.

87. See Taylor, *Western Massachusetts in the Revolution*, chap. 5; Patterson, *Political Parties*, chaps. 8 and 9; Morison, "The Struggle over the Adoption of the Constitution," MHS, *Proceedings* 50 (May 1917): 353–411; and *Constitution of the Commonwealth*. For an analysis of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 that places less emphasis upon JA's role as principal author, see Ronald M. Peters Jr., *The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780: A Social Compact* (Amherst, MA, 1978).

88. The best discussion of the complicated process of ratification is Morison's "The Struggle over the Adoption of the Constitution." It displays a clear bias toward the views of Massachusetts's eastern elite and an unqualified admiration for JA, but mentions many objections that voters raised, no matter how trivial or foolish, to several parts of the constitution, and discusses fully the more popular and substantial criticisms.

89. See David P. Szatmary, *Shays' Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst, MA, 1980); and Leonard L. Richards, *Shays's Rebellion: The American Revolution's Final Battle* (Philadelphia, 2002).

90. See Morison, *A History of the Constitution of Massachusetts*; and *Constitution of the Commonwealth*. On JA's attendance at the convention of 1820, see chap. 10, sect. 7.

91. See Thorpe, *Federal and State Constitutions*, vol. 3, and *Constitution of the Commonwealth*. The dates given in parentheses are for the popular ratification of the relevant amendments, which were framed one or two years prior to each date, either by the constitutional conventions of 1820 and 1917, or by the legislature. *Constitution of the Commonwealth*, 99–103, coordinates the amendments to the years in which they were framed, and then approved by the voters; the amendments appear on pp. 35–98.

92. *Constitution of the Commonwealth*, 35–103.

93. JA first complained of these shortcomings in print, without specifically tying them to Massachusetts, in the first volume of his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States* (London, 1787), in that volume's letter XX, entitled "England" (JA, *Works*, 4:358–59).

Chapter VII. An Education in American Aristocracy, 1775–1783

Epigraph: AFC, 3:160.

1. See chap. 5, sects. 1 and 2; and chap. 6, sects. 1 and 2.

2. On the first stage in this transformation, see chaps. 1–3, and sect. 1, in the present chapter; on the second, see chap. 6, and sect. 2, in the present chapter; on the third, see sects. 4 and 5, in the present chapter, and chap. 8.

3. See chap. 1, sect. 2, and n. 38, on Deacon John Adams's 1761 will; and chaps. 1 and 2, and sect. 1, in this chapter, on the Quincys and Ebenezer Thayer.

4. No conclusion can be drawn from the fact that JA never employed the word *elite*, which did not come into use in English secular writing until the 1820s in Britain, and in the 1880s in America (*OED*, 5:142).

5. On eighteenth-century republics, see Robert R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*, vol. 1, *The Challenge* (Princeton, NJ, 1954); and JA's *Defence of the Constitutions*, vol. 1. The literature on democratic Athens is voluminous; especially helpful in understanding the role of aristocracy in Athens's democratic culture is Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton, 1989).

6. The literature that deals with the development of aristocracy in eighteenth-century British American society is too extensive to summarize here. For the image of colonial aristocracy advanced in this paragraph, see Rowland Berthoff and John M. Murrin, "Feudalism, Communalism, and the Yeoman Freeholder: The American Revolution Considered as a Social Accident," in Stephen G. Kurtz and James H. Hutson, eds., *Essays on the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1973), 256–88; Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988); Greene, "Legislative Turnover in Colonial British America, 1696 to 1775: A Quantitative Analysis," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 38 (1981): 442–63; and Richard Alan Ryerson, "Portrait of a Colonial Oligarchy: The Quaker Elite in the Pennsylvania Assembly, 1729–1776," in Bruce C. Daniels, ed., *Power and Status: Officeholding in Colonial America* (Middletown, CT, 1986), 106–35, 295–300.

7. See William H. Nelson, *The American Tory* (Oxford, 1961), chaps. 1, 2, and 4; Bernard Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson* (Cambridge, MA, 1974); Ryerson, *Revolution Is Now Begun*; and chaps. 4 and 5.

8. See the concluding argument in this section.

9. JA, *Works*, 4:393 (*Defence*, vol. 1, letter XXV).

10. See chap. 1, on Braintree during JA's youth and early career. Edward M. Cook Jr., *The Fathers of the Towns: Leadership and Community Structure in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Baltimore, 1976), chap. 3, discusses the different levels of class articulation in New England towns, which usually varied in relation to their size, and devotes considerable attention to Braintree as an example of traditional leadership patterns.

11. On the Adamses and the Quincys in Braintree, see chap. 1, sects. 1–3, and the sources cited in the notes there.

12. William S. Pattee, *A History of Old Braintree and Quincy, with a Sketch of Randolph and Holbrook* (Quincy, MA, 1878); Andrew N. Adams, *A Genealogical History of Henry Adams, of Braintree, Mass., and His Descendants* (Rutland, VT, 1898); and chap. 1, sects. 2 and 3. On the Quincys' service on the Superior Court and in the legislature, see *Harvard University Quinquennial Catalogue of Officers and Graduates, 1636–1925* (Cambridge, MA, 1925), and Sibley-Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*.

13. See chap. 1, sects. 2 and 3, and chap. 2.

14. See chap. 1, sect. 1 (JA at Harvard), and sects. 2 and 4 (JA and Gridley). The *Quinquennial Catalogue*, which lists all the graduates of the College by year and by the rank of each student, based on his family's social standing, makes clear the relative status of the Adamses and the Quincys. On the role of patronage in the aristocratic behavior of pre-Revolutionary America, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992), esp. chap. 4.

15. See chaps. 1–3.

16. For JA's connections with these figures, see chaps. 1 and 2 (the Quincys, and Jonathan Sewall), chaps. 5 and 6 (James Warren), and chaps. 2–4 (on Benjamin Lynde, William Cushing, and Edmund Trowbridge, judges of the Superior Court). Sewall married Esther Quincy, the elder daughter of Edmund Quincy of Braintree; she was a first cousin of Hannah Quincy, and a second cousin of Abigail Smith Adams's mother, Elizabeth Quincy Smith.

17. See Cook, *Fathers of the Towns*, chap. 8, and Stephen E. Patterson, *Political Parties in Revolutionary Massachusetts* (Madison, WI, 1973), chaps. 8–9, on the continuation in office of pre-1776 leaders, both at the town and state level, through the end of the 1770s and into the 1780s.

18. Carl Lotus Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760–1776* (Madison, WI, 1909), 22; and see chap. 5.

19. AA to JA, 31 Mar. and 5 Apr. 1776 (one letter), *AFC*, 1:369–71, quotation on p. 370.

20. *AFC*, 1:381–83, quotation on p. 382.

21. David Hawke used the evocative phrase "in the midst of a revolution" as the title of his brief study of the Revolution in Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1961).

22. James Sullivan's letter to Elbridge Gerry of 6 May 1776 is quoted at length in *PJA*, 4:212–13n.

23. *PJA*, 4:208–12, quotation on p. 210.

24. *PJA*, 5:161–62, quotation on p. 161; and see Freeman to JA, 25 Mar. 1777, *PJA*, 5:128–30. JA's correspondent himself exhibited another aspect of a hunger for power, although JA indicates no awareness of it. Samuel Freeman was one of the last prominent plural officeholders in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, drafted by JA, would put an end to legislators holding executive or judicial positions (Samuel Eliot Morison, *A History of the Constitution of Massachusetts* [Boston, 1917], 13; Ellen E. Brennan, *Plural Office-Holding in Massachusetts, 1760–1780: Its Relation to the "Separation" of Departments of Government* [Chapel Hill, NC, 1945], 117).

25. *PJA*, 8:276–77, 197–99; and Freeman to JA, 25 Mar. 1779, *PJA*, 5:128–30.

26. *D&A*, 2:97 (25 June).

27. For the charges, made between 1787 and 1815, that JA had become enamored of monarchy and aristocracy, see chaps. 9 and 10.

28. Edward Handler, *America and Europe in the Political Thought of John Adams* (Cambridge, MA, 1964), and John R. Howe, *The Changing Political Thought of John*

Adams (Princeton, 1966), are cited in Wood, *Creation of the Republic*, chap. 14, nn. 1, 13, 19, and 20.

29. Jefferson's outspoken admiration for the French Revolution in the 1790s gave him effective immunity from any charge of consorting with the French aristocracy. Franklin, too, could have been criticized for moving in French aristocratic circles, which he did. But quite aside from his carefully homespun image in Paris, Franklin expressed political sentiments and engaged in local political activity in 1776, before his departure for France, and again upon his return to America in 1785, that were strongly democratic. Two historians who have rejected this characterization are Joseph J. Ellis, *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams* (New York, 1993); and C. Bradley Thompson, *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty* (Lawrence, KS, 1998).

30. See chap. 5, on *Thoughts on Government*; and chap. 6, on the Massachusetts constitution. JA's letter of 27 April 1777 to Freeman, quoted and discussed in sect. 2, above, was unavailable to scholars until its inclusion in the 1950s microfilm edition of the Adams Papers, and then its publication in vol. 5 of the *Papers of John Adams* in 1983. JA was first called "The Duke of Braintree" by an Anti-Federalist newspaper editor in the early 1790s (Page Smith, *John Adams* [New York, 1962], 2:815).

31. See Jack D. Warren, "In the Shadow of Washington: John Adams as Vice President," in Richard Alan Ryerson, ed., *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic* (Boston, 2001), 117–41; and chap. 9.

32. Warren, "In the Shadow of Washington"; and see Edith B. Gelles, "'Splendid Misery': Abigail as First Lady," in Ryerson, *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic*, 186–234.

33. See JA's letters from France and Holland to the president of Congress (his manner of addressing the whole institution), in *PJA*, vols. 8–12 (1779–82); and his letters to R. R. Livingston, Congress's first secretary for foreign affairs, in *PJA*, vols. 12–15 (1782–83). JA wrote ninety-nine such letters between landing in Spain in December 1779 and departing from Paris in July 1780, just over one hundred letters between arriving in Holland in August 1780 and the end of 1781, another forty letters to Livingston between February 1782 and Livingston's leaving office in June 1783, and some thirty more before he learned of Livingston's departure. JA's "Peace Journal," which he drew from his diary entries in November and December 1782, became essentially a public document when it was read in Congress in 1783. During his retirement, JA published the journal, along with scores of fresh letters defending his diplomatic service, in the *Boston Patriot*. See *D&A*, 3:42–43n, and *PJA*, 14:xviii–xx.

34. On JA's first appointment to Paris and his departure from Boston, see *D&A*, 2:267n (15 Nov.), 269–71 (13–15 Feb.), and 4:1–7; and several letters in *PJA*, 5:333–70, and 393–94. Several works provide extensive narrative analyses of JA's diplomacy in Europe; particularly notable are Richard B. Morris, *The Peacemakers: The Great Powers & American Independence* (New York, 1965); Peter Shaw, *The Character of John Adams* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1976); James H. Hutson, *John Adams and the Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (Lexington, KY, 1980); and Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1982). For two brief interpretive overviews, see Gregg L. Lint, "John Adams and the 'Bolder Plan,'" in Ryerson, *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic*, 105–14; and Richard Alan Ryerson, "John Adams in Europe: A Provincial Cosmopolitan Confronts the Metropolitan World, 1778–1788," in Leonard J. Sadosky et al., eds., *Old World, New World: America and Europe in the Age of Jefferson* (Charlottesville, VA, 2010), 131–54.

35. On the complexities of the Deane-Lee controversy, especially as its explosive climax in December 1778 affected JA, see *D&A*, 2:345–54; *PJA*, 7:401–4; and *AFC*, 3:160–61, 175, and 177. For commentary, see Morris, *Peacemakers*, chap. 1, and Jack N. Rakove, *The Beginnings of National Politics: An Interpretive History of the Continental Congress* (New York, 1979), chap. 11.

36. JA's first diplomatic mission and his first voyages to and from France are fully detailed in *PJA*, vols. 5–8; *D&A*, 2:271–400, and 4:8–172; and *AFC*, 3:1–223.

37. On JA's second appointment, his second voyage to Europe, and his travel across northern Spain and western France to Paris, see *PJA*, 8:170–87, 203–4; *D&A*, 2:400–435, and 4:173–240; and *AFC*, 3:224–72.

38. JA's second residence in Paris and his activities there, from February through July 1780, are thoroughly covered in *PJA*, 8:320–80; 9 (the entire volume); and 10:1–59. See also *D&A*, 2:435–43, and 4:240–54; and *AFC*, 3:271–395.

39. JA's mission to the Netherlands from 1780 to 1782 is richly detailed in *PJA*, vols. 10–13; see also *D&A*, 3:1–30.

40. See *PJA*, 11:368–77, 379–80 (June 1781), for Congress's appointment of and instructions to the new peace commission; and *PJA*, vols. 14 and 15, for JA's return to Paris and the peace negotiations there.

41. JA became anxious at the lack of letters from America by November 1778 (*PJA*, 7:235, 236). During his first mission in Paris, he received letters from seven friends and political colleagues and three of his wife's relations in Massachusetts, as well as from three congressional colleagues in Philadelphia, but only three Massachusetts correspondents, and two in Congress, wrote him more than twice. Another half dozen of his occasional Massachusetts correspondents from 1775 to 1777 did not write to him in Paris, including Francis Dana and William Tudor, his former law clerk who was a close friend. JA wrote several letters from Paris to James Warren in Massachusetts, and to Samuel Adams, Richard Henry Lee, and James Lovell in Congress. His most important Massachusetts correspondent was James Warren. JA's correspondence with Massachusetts and congressional friends during his later European missions followed a similar pattern. His correspondence with AA, however, was more voluminous than that of all his other American correspondents combined, both in 1778–79, and from 1780 to 1784. See *PJA*, vols. 6–15; and *AFC*, vols. 3–5.

42. On JA's reaction to Franklin's conduct of business in Paris, see *D&A*, 2:305, 346, and 4:69, 87–88, 118–19, and 120. All these entries except that at 2:346 (of 9 Feb. 1779) are dated in April and May 1778, but all the entries in *D&A*, vol. 4, are from JA's autobiography, which blends earlier diary material with his later reminiscences. JA was careful not to criticize Franklin in any letter, even to AA, in 1778 or 1779. By the summer of 1778, he had gained a greater appreciation for the value of the French alliance (*PJA*, 6:347–48), but by December he had become convinced that Vergennes's secretiveness was undercutting any useful purpose of the American commissioners (*PJA*, 7:248–49, 254–55).

43. On JA's opinion of Arthur Lee, see JA to Samuel Adams, 7 Dec. 1778 (*PJA*, 7:255–59); on Franklin and JA's exclusion of Lee from certain business, see Benjamin Franklin and JA to William Temple Franklin, 20 Nov. 1778 (*PJA*, 7:223–25).

44. JA first expressed his belief that a three-man commission to France was unnecessary to Samuel Adams, 21 May 1778 (*D&A*, 4:106–8, calendared in *PJA*, 6:144–45). It is not clear from this letter if he was trying to hint that he should replace the commission, or simply saying that any one man, including Franklin, could do so. On Con-

gress's appointment of Franklin, see *JCC*, 12:908, 1039–52, and *PJA*, 7:152–54, 158, 169. The commissioners suggested a greater French naval effort in a memorial drafted in December 1778 and sent to Vergennes before 9 Jan. 1779 (*PJA*, 7:292–311).

45. JA to AA, 27 Nov. 1778, *AFC*, 3:122–23 and 123–24nn3 and 4 (on a possible mission to Vienna); JA to AA, 21 Feb. 1779, *AFC*, 3:176–78 (on possible missions to Holland or Spain); *D&A*, 2:345–53; JA to AA, 9 Feb. 1779, *AFC*, 3:160–61 (quotation on p. 160).

46. JA to AA, 13, 20, and 28 Feb. 1779, *AFC*, 3:169, 174, 181–82 (block quote). For JA's continuing resentment at his abrupt termination, see his letters to Henry Knox and Benjamin Rush, both of 19 Sept. 1779 (*PJA*, 8:152, 153).

47. Congress's appointment of JA as its sole peace commissioner in September 1779 would suggest that its failure to formally dismiss him and thank him for his services in the fall of 1778 was an oversight. Its dealings with JA from 1781 to 1783, however, are more problematical (see below in this section).

48. See *PJA*, 7:152–53, and 154n3. For JA's view of the complex relationship between Deane, Franklin, Arthur Lee, and Congress in 1778–79, see *D&A*, 2:304–5, 345–50, 352–53, and 4:39, 43, 68–69, 86–87, 98–99, 145. See also Morris, *Peacemakers*, 8–11; and Rakove, *Beginnings of National Politics*, chap. 11.

49. See Palmer, *Age of the Democratic Revolution*, vol. 1.

50. *PJA*, 8:170–78, 179–84, 185, 188–90, 201, 203; *D&A*, 4:178–80 (JA's commission), and 181–83 (his instructions); Morris, *Peacemakers*, chap. 1; Rakove, *Beginnings of National Politics*, 255–58.

51. For Congress's repeated votes of confidence in JA, see *PJA*, 9:452–53 (June 1780); 10:407–8, 423–24 (Dec. 1780), 447–58 (JA's commission to the Netherlands, and accompanying instructions, also Dec. 1780); and *AFC*, 5:321n, 328 (1784), and 6:15, 21–22n, 106–7, 108 (1785).

52. On the announcement of JA's mission, see *PJA*, 9:93–94, and Morris, *Peacemakers*, 191–98. JA's involvement in the devaluation controversy is set out in detail in *PJA*, 9:427–33, 449–50, 453–70, 477–79, 480–81, 491–93, and 495–96. He later recounted his difficulties with Franklin in 1780 at length in his letter of 15 May 1811, to the *Boston Patriot*, extracted in JA, *Works*, 1:649–64. Yet Vergennes's and Franklin's motives remain obscure (see Morris, *Peacemakers*, 196–97). Perhaps Vergennes thought that JA, having come from America—and left Congress—more recently than Franklin, would be more able to persuade that body to exempt French merchants from its devaluation, although any special exemption made no fiscal sense whatever. Franklin, for his part, may simply have been ducking an issue that he knew could not be resolved to Vergennes's satisfaction, but his decision was hardly a responsible discharge of his duties as Congress's envoy to Versailles. It is possible that either or both Vergennes and Franklin simply wanted to see JA get in difficulty and be dismissed, but this seems unlikely as early as 1780.

53. See *PJA*, 9:516–29, and 10:1–4, 16–18, 32–51, 56–58 (letters from 13 to 29 July). Shortly before his blow up with Vergennes, JA sought and received the French minister's approval for his trip to Holland (*PJA*, 10:26). Congress later approved JA's defense of its currency devaluation (*PJA*, 10:407–8, 423–24). JA's commission to Holland is at *PJA*, 10:449.

54. For analyses of JA's mission to the Netherlands, see Schulte Nordholt, *John Adams and American Independence*; Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780–1813* (New York, 1977), 2, 59–63; and Hutson, *John Adams and the Diplomacy of the American Revolution*, chaps. 4–5. For an excellent brief bibliography on Dutch politics in the late eighteenth century, see Peter Nicholaisen, "John Adams,

Thomas Jefferson, and the Dutch Patriots," in Sadosky et al., *Old World, New World*, 123–24n1.

55. *PJA*, 11:368–77; Morris, *Peacemakers*, 210–17; Hutson, *John Adams and the Diplomacy of the American Revolution*, chap. 6; and Rakove, *Beginnings of National Politics*, 255, 273–74. Richard Buel Jr., *In Irons: Britain's Naval Supremacy and the American Revolutionary Economy* (New Haven, 1998), provides an effective discussion of America's difficult position in 1780 and early 1781.

56. *PJA*, 11:368–83, 467–69, and 12:2 (JA's commission and instructions); 11:469–70n (his illness); and 11:375–76 and 377nn5 and 6 (his incomplete decoding).

57. *PJA*, 11:447, and 12:40–44 (Livingston's appointment); 11:272–84 (JA's memorial of Apr.–May); 11:301–2, 305–8 (JA's May letters to Congress); and 12:76n2 (C. F. W. Dumas's letter to Congress, announcing JA's memorial).

58. Livingston to JA, 20 Nov. 1781 (*PJA*, 12:73–77, quotations at pp. 74 and 74–75).

59. For JA's instructions of 1779 and 1780, see nn. 50 and 51, above. His some two hundred letters to Congress, written from Spain, France, and Holland, between December 1779 and January 1782, appear in full or are calendared in *PJA*, vols. 8–12.

60. See Morris, *Peacemakers*, 216–17, on Livingston, Congress's pro-French faction, and the Chevalier de la Luzerne, the French minister to Congress. The best biography of the secretary is George Dangerfield, *Chancellor Robert R. Livingston of New York, 1746–1813* (New York, 1960). As the first sentence of his foreword, Dangerfield declares: "This book is primarily a study in aristocracy" (p. vii). Livingston's partly Dutch American family and his birth and residence in a province/state with a strong Dutch heritage may have encouraged him to believe he knew something about contemporary Holland, but his occupation was primarily the administration of his vast estates in New York and New Jersey, not in Atlantic trade, and his profession was the law.

61. JA to Livingston, 19 and 21 Feb., 19 Apr., 5 July (second letter of this day), and 8 Oct. 1782 (*PJA*, 12:240, 250, 420; and 13:158, 389 [initial pages]); Livingston to JA, 5 Mar., 29, 30 May, 4 July, 29 Aug., 15 Sept., 18 Nov. 1782, and 13 Feb., 1783 (*PJA*, 12:295; 13:84, 86, 155, 406, 465; and 14:68, and 259 [initial pages]).

62. Livingston to JA, 29 May, 29 Aug., and 15 Sept. 1782 (*PJA*, 13:84–85, 406–8, and 465–68); JA to Livingston, 12 Sept. 1782 (probably not sent) (*PJA*, 13:459).

63. Arthur Lee to JA, 7 Aug. 1782; JA to Lee, 10 Oct. 1782 (*PJA*, 13:219–22, 523–26); and see *PJA*, 14:xvi–xvii, xxv–xxvi.

64. *PJA*, 11:376.

65. *PJA*, 14:2–6, block quote at pp. 2–3. The only extant manuscript source of this letter is JA's letter book; the block quote, from *PJA*, 14:2–3, preserves JA's spelling and his relatively rare beginnings of sentences with lower case letters.

66. *PJA*, 14:2 (JA quoting Jay); JA to Livingston, 14 Dec. 1782 (*PJA*, 14:125–27); the Commissioners to Livingston, 14 Dec. 1782 (*PJA*, 14:128–31); *D&A*, 3:41–96 (JA's "Peace Journal"); Livingston to the Commissioners, 25 Mar. 1783 (*PJA*, 14:361–64).

67. *PJA*, 15:140–49 (with editorial note). See also the unsent first draft of Jay's letter of July to Livingston, with a comment by Franklin, and a related letter by Henry Laurens to Livingston (also not sent?), in JA, *Works*, 1:676–79.

68. JA to Livingston, 9, 10, and 11 July, and JA to Morris, 5 July 1783 (*PJA*, 15:92–97, 99–100, and 81–83 [quotation, pp. 82–83]). See also an extract of JA's letter of 23 Oct. 1811, on French opposition to American interests in the peace negotiations, published in the *Boston Patriot*, in JA, *Works*, 1:665–69.

69. Franklin to Livingston, 22 July 1783, *PBF*, 40:355–70, quote at pp. 357–58. *AFC*, 5:250–52, prints Congressman Elbridge Gerry's letter to AA of 18 Sept. 1783, with its

extract from Franklin's letter; AA conveyed the substance of Franklin's comment to JA in December 1783.

70. See n. 69, above; Peter Shaw, *The Character of John Adams*, 150–52, 190–91; and Hutson, *John Adams and the Diplomacy of the American Revolution*, 97–98.

71. For a brief discussion of JA's fevers, see *PJA*, 11:470n, and 15:294; *D&A*, 3:143–44; *AFC*, 5:255–56; and see n. 73, below.

72. Congress named Laurens minister to the Netherlands in September 1779, the same month in which it appointed JA its peace negotiator and John Jay its minister to Spain. But Laurens insisted on returning to South Carolina in the fall to secure reelection to Congress in order to strengthen his authority. He returned to Philadelphia in the spring of 1780 and sailed for Europe in August, only to be captured by a British warship and imprisoned in the Tower of London from October 1780 to December 1781 (*ANB*, 13:261–63). Congress named Thomas Jefferson to America's five-man peace commission in June 1781, but he declined to leave his family for service in Europe.

73. John Ferling and Lewis E. Braverman, "John Adams' Health Reconsidered," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 55 (1998): 83–104.

74. Gordon S. Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 39 (1982): 401–41; reprinted in Wood, *The Idea of America: Reflections on the Birth of the United States* (New York, 2011), 81–123, 347–56 (notes).

75. See *PJA*, 14:xvi–xxi, xxv–xxvi, 4–5; and the citations to *PJA*, vol. 15, in nn. 67–68, above.

76. See sect. 4, and n. 52, above, on 1780; and *PJA*, 13:508–10, and 14:248, and 420, on Franklin's negotiating a treaty with Sweden without informing JA and John Jay and threatening to monopolize all American negotiations.

77. James Madison, *The Federalist*, No. 10, in *James Madison: Writings*, ed. Jack Rakove (New York, 1999), 161.

Chapter VIII. Redefining the Republican Tradition, 1784–1787

Epigraphs: JA, *Works*, 4:579 (*Defence*, 1:362). The first citations to JA's *Defence* in this chapter will be to the text in *Works*, the most widely available source, but the notes will supply the "letter" number (see sect. 3, below) and, where necessary, the volume number of the original edition, and whenever material is quoted from the *Defence*, it will follow the original text, and the note will give the page number(s).

PTJ, 12:396–97. JA refers to the new U.S. Constitution, which he in London, and Jefferson in Paris, had recently received from America, and which Jefferson had just criticized (Jefferson to JA, 13 Nov. 1787, *PTJ*, 12:350–51; and see JA to Jefferson, 10 Nov. 1787, *PTJ*, 12:335).

1. Charles Francis Adams, in JA, *Works*, 4:274, remarked that JA "was always prompted to write by a sense of the necessity of immediate exertion" (see sect. 3, below). I characterize JA's reputation as an author as "modest," which he in part intended, because he published almost all of his work before 1787 anonymously, nearly every one of his newspaper essays or pamphlets had a quite limited circulation, and most of his writings were well known only to political elites in Massachusetts and in Congress.

2. *D&A*, 2:297, 4:41–42 (JA's meeting Turgot).

3. J.G.A. Pocock makes this assessment in *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ, 1975), 526.

4. AA to Royall Tyler, [4 Jan. 1785], *AFC*, 6:45–50, quote at p. 45; JA to Thomas Jefferson, 16 July 1814 (*PTJ, Retirement Series*, 7:478–79); AA to Mary Smith Cranch, 9, 12 Dec. 1784, *AFC*, 6:14–23, see p. 18.

5. JA's celebrated letter of post–12 May 1780 to AA (*AFC*, 3:341–43), underlines this point: he was too busy with the immediate demands—including the scholarly demands—of his diplomatic tasks to indulge in tempting cultural diversions. On his illness and convalescence in September–October 1783, largely in the house in Auteuil that he would rent the following year, see *D&A*, 3:143–46; on his first visit to England, with JQA, from October 1783 to January 1784, see *D&A*, 3:146–54. JA's diplomatic activities in Holland from January to August 1784 are fully documented in *PJA*, vols. 15 and 16. For JA's commission and original instructions (Oct. 1783), and his new instructions (May 1784), as a commissioner, see *PJA*, 15:329, 331–34, and 16:193–202.

6. *D&A*, 3:154–67, and *AFC*, 5:355, 358–86, 397–419 (AA's crossing to England and reunion with JQA and JA); *PJA*, 16:319–430 (the commission's early activity). Although the commissioners concluded or approved three treaties, that with Portugal was never ratified by either Portugal or the United States. For its negotiation, largely by Jefferson, see *PJA*, vol. 17, and *PTJ*, vols. 10 and 11.

7. *AFC*, 6:47 (tutoring JQA), and 6:18, 45 (JA's reading). Because JA would discuss some authors, notably Machiavelli, in much greater detail in volume 1 of his *Defence* than he had done previously, he could also have been studying them in Auteuil, but there is no evidence that he did so.

8. JA to Jefferson, 16 July 1814, *PTJ, Retirement Series*, 2:478–79 (disappointment with Plato); *AFC*, 6:106, 109n (appointment to Britain), and 151 (departure from Auteuil on 20 May). On JA's intention to write on the nobility in 1784–85, see C. Bradley Thompson, *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty* (Lawrence, KS, 1998), 93, citing Jefferson to JA, 6 Feb. 1787, and JA to Jefferson, 1 Mar. 1787 (*PTJ*, 11:118, 189–90); and JA to Jefferson, 13 July 1813 (*PTJ, Retirement Series*, 6:287).

9. *AFC*, 6:169, 173n3 (JA's arrival in London).

10. See *AFC*, vols. 6 and 7; *PJA*, vol. 17; and Charles R. Ritcheson, *Aftermath of Revolution: British Policy toward the United States, 1783–1795* (Dallas, 1969).

11. JA, *Works*, 8:370, quoted in Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 93. JA introduced this subject to Sarsfield because he knew the count was making an inquiry "into fiefs." On JA's delightfully eccentric friend Comte Sarsfield and some of his ideas about European governments, see *D&A*, 2:380–81; 3:11, 18–24, 27, 91, and 93.

12. *AFC*, 7:132–33.

13. *AFC*, 7:307–36 (AA on the visit to Holland); JA to Richard Cranch, 15 Jan. 1787, LbC, Adams Papers, Microfilms, reel 113; Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1982), 251, 274–75; Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780–1813* (New York, 1977), chap. 2.

14. See Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, chap. 5. Thompson's work is a thorough study of the principal themes and intellectual sources of JA's *Defence*, and I am largely in agreement with his argument on most aspects of these topics. On the larger significance of the *Defence*, however, I would suggest that the *Spirit of Liberty* overstates both the quality of this fascinating work and its importance in the literature of the Western political tradition.

15. JA, *Works*, 4:299–302. In November 1784, JA expressed doubt about the advice of the Abbé de Mably, Dr. Price, and Baron Turgot that America form a stronger national union, thus indicating some knowledge of Turgot's letter in the fall (*PJA*, 16:366). In

April 1785, he thanked Dr. Price for copies of his *Observations* that Price had sent to Benjamin Franklin, to be given to JA (JA, *Works*, 8:232; *PJA*, 17:2–3). H. J. Jackson, "John Adams's Marginalia, Then and Now," in Robert C. Baron and Conrad Edick Wright, eds., *The Libraries, Leadership & Legacy of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson* (Golden, CO, 2010), 59, 60, 63, 70–71, dates JA's marginalia to Turgot's letter, evidently the first marginalia he ever made in any publication, to this period because Franklin asked to borrow JA's copy so he could enter JA's comments into his own copy. This could only have been in April or May, just before JA went to England, and shortly before Franklin returned to America.

16. See the beginning of the extract from Turgot's 1778 letter in JA, *Works*, 4:278; *D&A*, 2:297, and 4:41–42; and *Works*, 4:279 (the block quote from Turgot's letter), and 4:299 (JA's quotation from Turgot's letter in his opening letter of the *Defence*, p. 3–4). Turgot's letter was in reply to Price's *Additional Observations on Civil Liberty* (London, 1777).

17. In his letter, Turgot criticized test oaths designed to exclude pacifist Quakers from public life that were contained in the constitutions of Pennsylvania and "the Jerseys," but Dr. Price pointed out that the text Turgot quoted as from New Jersey's constitution was actually from that of Delaware. This passage is the strongest evidence of Turgot's having seen at least part of the text of any American constitution; his error suggests that he may have seen both New Jersey's and Delaware's constitutions, as well as Pennsylvania's. Full texts of the constitutions of Virginia, Maryland, and New York, as well as of Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey, were available in Europe before 1778; the constitutions of North Carolina and Georgia had not yet appeared there. See JA, *Works*, 4:279 (Turgot's letter, with Price's correction); and *PJA*, 8:236, 368, 369, 377, 378, and 380, on the European publication of American constitutions up to 1780.

18. The only reference to the federal Constitution in the *Defence* appears at the end of vol. 3 (letter VII, dated 26 Dec. 1787). JA first read the Constitution in November (JA to Thomas Jefferson, 10 Nov. 1787, *PTJ*, 12:335).

19. JA, *Works*, 4:300 (letter I, p. 4). Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, chap. 5, reviews the motivations for writing the *Defence* that various historians have attributed to JA. The interpretation presented here largely agrees with his analysis; he particularly emphasizes JA's interest in the Dutch republic (*Spirit of Liberty*, 93–94), discussed below.

20. On the relationship of the prospects of French political reform to the *Defence*, see Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 92, 94–96, 298n7, and 299nn17–20. JA's first sources for Massachusetts news that fall were AA's relatives and friends. By 10 October 1786, she had received letters dated as late as mid-August (see *AFC*, 7:559); the most recent letters that conveyed political news were by Cotton Tufts to AA, 6 July, by Mary Smith Cranch to AA, 10–11 July, and by Charles Storer to AA, 15 August (*AFC*, 7:244–46, 248–50, and 321–22). Storer's letter is the only one to indicate, quite briefly, that local unrest had begun to take the form of mass protests to which JA refers in the Preliminary Observations of the *Defence*. This suggests that letter I of the *Defence*, dated 4 October, was probably revised somewhat later than its date. Organized local protests were beginning in Massachusetts, as well as in New Hampshire and Rhode Island, just at this time (mid-August), so JA may not have revised or redated this opening letter, but he made no reference to Shays's Rebellion in his correspondence until late November. Between that time and early January 1786, he was persuaded, at least in part by the rebellion, to publish his volume for a broad audience and send it promptly to America. See AA's letters to JQA of 22 Nov. 1786 and 17 Jan. 1787, and to her sisters of 20 Jan. 1787, *AFC*, 7:395–96, 442–43, 450, and 453; JA to Richard Cranch, 15 Jan. 1787, LbC, Adams

Papers, Microfilms, reel 113; and David P. Szatmary, *Shays' Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst, MA, 1980), chap. 3.

21. The dates given here for the Adamses' journey, 6 August to 2 September, are for their actual stay in Holland. See AA to Abigail Adams Smith, [11] Aug. 1786 (their arrival); and Abigail Adams Smith to JQA, 1 Sept.–12 Oct. 1786, and AA to Mary Cranch, 12 Sept. 1786 (for the probable date of their departure), in *AFC*, 7:315, 329, 331, 333. On JA's earlier relationship with leaders of the Patriot Party in the Netherlands, see *PJA*, vols. 10–12; Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, chaps. 7–16; and Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, chap. 2. JA briefly refers to the Netherlands twice in volume 1 of the *Defence*, in letters IV and XIX (JA, *Works*, 4:325–26 and 356–57); see sect. 4, below.

22. This letter, which has not been published, was filed and filmed along with scores of undated, fragmentary copies of text from select literary works, and dozens of brief original drafts, all in JA's hand. It appears near the end of reel 188 of the Adams Papers microfilm edition. The literary fragments on that reel were copied from various sources, primarily in French and Latin, with occasional passages in Greek; most of those filmed in the latter half of the reel relate directly to JA's *Defence* and appear along with fragmentary drafts of several of the brief "letters" on various republics that appear in volume 1.

Thompson is evidently the first scholar to use this letter, and quotes a substantial part of it in *Spirit of Liberty*, 94. The date of its composition is uncertain, but JA probably drafted it before 4 October 1786, the date of his first "letter" in the *Defence*, because at the bottom of the page that immediately precedes this letter on reel 188, he wrote: "The following Letters were really begun [replacing the deleted word "written" in the document] for the Amusement of the Gentleman to whom addressed." The number and location of other "letters" referred to here are unknown; the draft of one other letter to William Stephens Smith follows this letter on reel 188, but it does not closely resemble any letter that appears in the *Defence*. If JA really did have the "dream" that he describes in the letter quoted here, however, it can be placed at c. 2–5 September 1786, the date of the Adamses' long and difficult return crossing of the North Sea (see *AFC*, 7:329, 331, 333n5).

23. Adams Papers, Microfilms, reel 188. On JA's exchange of ratifications of the commercial treaty with a Prussian envoy at The Hague in August 1786, see *AFC*, 7:300, 306, 307n.

24. Adams Papers. Microfilms, reel 188. The Abbé de Mably, JA's good friend since their first meeting in Paris in 1778, died on 23 April 1785, shortly before the Adamses departed for England in May. See the many references to Mably in *D&A*, in *PJA*, and in *AFC*, vol. 6.

25. The *Defence* could also have addressed in detail another constitutional issue that Turgot had raised in 1778 and that both the Abbé de Mably and Dr. Price raised again in 1784, America's lack of a strong alliance to bind together its member states, but JA was not immediately convinced of their position (*PJA*, 16:366–67). JA did favor a strong national union, and from 1785 to 1787 he complained that the lack of it frustrated his attempt to persuade Britain to conclude a commercial treaty with America, but in volume 1 of the *Defence*, in letter LIII, entitled "Congress," he paid only the briefest attention to America's confederation, and still seemed uncertain that it needed any substantial reform (see sect. 4, below). He also made no reference to America's growing nationalist movement, led by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and others, with

George Washington's quiet approval; indeed, there is no evidence that he was particularly aware of that movement.

26. AA to JQA, 22 Nov. 1786, *AFC*, 7:396; JA, *Works*, 4:274. In the last letter in volume 3 of his *Defence*, JA admitted that his haste "upon the spur of a particular occasion" had harmed the work (*Works*, 4:274n1; 6:217–18). On reel 188 of the Adams Papers microfilm edition, just before his letter to William Stephens Smith quoted above, he wrote: "Hurry and Want of time, are the worst kind of Apologies, where time is to be had. [lost text?] here a fugitive Pamphlet thrown out at the Moment may do some good." This suggests that in September or early October 1786, JA may have intended to write no more than "a Pamphlet" in response to the "particular occasion" of the moment. This "occasion," whether it was the political revolution in Holland, as the "dream" letter suggests, or Shays's Rebellion in Massachusetts, political turmoil in Ireland, or impending political change in France, is never conclusively identified anywhere in JA's writings.

27. The publication history of Adams's *Defence* has passed through three broad phases. (1) C. Dilly published the first edition in London, serially in three volumes (Jan. 1787, Aug. 1787, and Jan. 1788). Printers in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston brought out fresh copies of the first volume in 1787, and over the next decade new three-volume editions appeared in London, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. A two-volume French edition that omitted most of JA's second volume, entitled *Défense des constitutions américaines, ou, De la nécessité d'une balance dans les pouvoirs d'un gouvernement libre*, appeared in Paris in 1792. JA made no corrections or alterations to any of the subsequent editions, even when invited to do so by the printer of the second London edition in 1794 (JA, *Works*, 4:274n1). And with the exception of the French edition, which will be discussed toward the end of this chapter, he appears to have paid them little notice. (2) The only nineteenth-century edition is the text prepared by Charles Francis Adams, with only occasional deletions, for inclusion in volumes 4 through 6 of his 10-volume *Works of John Adams* (Boston, 1851–56). (3) In the twentieth century two of the early editions were republished in photographic reproductions: the original London edition by Da Capo Press (New York, 1971), and the third Philadelphia edition, of 1797, by Scientia Verlag Aalen (Darmstadt, Germany, 1979). There is no modern, critical edition of Adams's *Defence of the Constitutions*, and if the preponderance of citations and quotations in the secondary literature is any guide, most scholars have not taken the trouble to make a direct acquaintance with JA's original text.

28. JA, *Works*, 4:283–588; 5:3–496; and 6:3–220.

29. Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 308n3.

30. In JA, *Works*, 4:283–588, Charles Francis Adams removed JA's letter numbers and grouped almost the entire contents of the fifty-seven letters into ten largely unbroken chapters, with relatively little rearrangement. He made one addition to this material by transferring the short chapter on the monarchical republic of Neufchatel, which JA had placed at the end of volume 2, to the end of the section on monarchical republics early in volume 1 (in C. F. Adams's vol. 4), where it properly belonged. He moved JA's letter LIV, a brief discussion of Locke, Milton, and Hume, from its position near the end of volume 1, to follow the material in JA's letter XXXIV, so that it completed JA's letters on modern and ancient philosophers and historians. And he moved JA's postscript on the Abbé de Mably, which appeared at the end of JA's volume 1, to follow the material on medieval Italian republics from JA's volumes 2 and 3, in *Works*, vol. 5: 491–96.

31. Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 126, 307n1 (quoting Pocock).

32. Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 308n3; H. Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1965), 122.

33. In *Spirit of Liberty*, Thompson entitles his chapter 5 "A Guidebook for Lawgivers"; at p. 106, he explains JA's use of this phrase. Jefferson, in his 23 February 1787 letter to JA, appears to concur in this view, stating that he hoped the *Defence* would become "an institute for our politicians, old as well as young" (*PTJ*, 11:177).

34. JA, *Works*, 4:299, 300 (letters I, II, pp. 3–4, 5). The "two or three" states were Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Vermont, the only American states with unicameral governments; JA identifies them in letter III (see n. 36, below). But one should note that Pennsylvania's provision for a unicameral legislature in its 1776 constitution was a continuation of the structure of its colonial constitution of 1701. For the probable date of JA's observation on Shays's Rebellion, see sect. 2 and n. 20, above.

35. JA, *Works*, 4:299, 301, 302 (letters I, II, pp. 3, 7). See JA's succinct statement of this theme in *Works*, 4:579 (letter LIII), quoted at the head of this chapter.

36. JA discusses the "democratical republics" in JA, *Works*, 4:303–27 (letters III–X); he mentions the Dutch provinces of Friesland and Overyssell and the city of Dort on pp. 325–26 (letter X, p. 22). JA had traveled through northern Spain to Bilbao, on his way to Paris, in the winter of 1780 (see *D&A*, 2:429–33; *PJA*, 8:300–305, 309–11). In *Works*, 4:312 (letter IV, entitled "Biscay"), he praises these republican Basque communities as superior to neighboring villages under the control of the Spanish monarchy. In *Works*, 4:309–10 (letter III, p. 16), he remarks that San Marino's rural simplicity "can be no example for the commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Georgia, or Vermont," unicameral states that were all much larger, and more populous and commercial.

37. JA treats his "aristocratical republics" in *Works*, 4:328–57 (letters XI–XIX). In *Works*, 4:347 (letter XIX), he remarks on the originally democratic character of Venice, and he thought the constitutional imbalance of Genoa especially worthy of American attention (*Works*, 4:343; letter XVIII).

38. JA, *Works*, 4:356–57 (letter XIX, p. 69). On the Prussian invasion and the collapse of the Patriot movement, see Peter Nicolaisen, "John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and the Dutch Patriots," in Leonard J. Sadosky et al., eds., *Old World, New World: America and Europe in the Age of Jefferson* (Charlottesville, VA, 2010), 105–30.

39. JA, *Works*, 4:358 (letter XX, p. 70). On JA's earlier characterization of the British constitution as republican, see chap. 4, sect. 3, and chap. 5, sect. 2. Jean de Lolme's *Constitution de l'Angleterre* was published in 1771 in Amsterdam, and appeared in English in 1772.

40. JA, *Works*, 4:358, 359 (letter XX, pp. 70, 71).

41. JA, *Works*, 4:360–73 (letters XXI, p. 74, and letter XXII). Sadly, the quasi-republican Kingdom of Poland was headed for extinction even more quickly than the Italian commercial republics. In the 1790s, Russia, Prussia, and Austria finished dismembering their weak neighbor in the Second and Third Partitions of Poland.

42. See sect. 6, below, and chap. 9.

43. JA, *Works*, 4:379 (letter XXIII, p. 91).

44. JA, *Works*, 4:379, 380 (letter XXIII, pp. 91, 92).

45. JA, *Works*, 4:380 (letter XXIII, p. 93).

46. JA, *Works*, 4:380–81, 381, 382 (letter XXIII, pp. 93, 95, 96). In his second letter numbered XXVII, briefly discussed below, JA reveals that he owed his dismissive

characterization of small, relatively democratic European republics in this Recapitulation (*Works*, 4:380–81) to descriptions of San Marino in Sidney's *Discourses*, and in travel accounts by other writers (*Works*, 4:423 [letter XXVII, pp. 151–52]).

47. JA, *Works*, 4:383 (letter XXIV, p. 97). C. F. Adams sets nearly the entire text of the letter in quotation marks (*Works*, 4:383–88).

48. JA, *Works*, 4:389–90 (letter XXV, pp. 105–6), and 410 (letter XXVI, p. 134). JA used the image again in his letter of 11 April 1805, to Benjamin Rush (*The Spur of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush, 1805–1813*, ed. John A. Schutz and Douglass Adair [San Marino, CA, 1966], 26–27).

49. JA, *Works*, 4:391–400, quotation at p. 393 (letter XXV, pp. 108–20, quotation at p. 111). See chap. 1, sects. 1 and 2, and Edward M. Cook Jr., *The Fathers of the Towns: Leadership and Community Structure in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Baltimore, 1976), on the political culture of eighteenth-century Massachusetts's rural communities.

50. JA, *Works*, 4:401–5, quotation at p. 405 (letter XXVI, pp. 121–27, quotation at p. 127).

51. JA, *Works*, 4:402, 406 (letter XXVI, pp. 124, 128–29).

52. JA, *Works*, 406 (letter XXVI, p. 129). On JA's early rejection of the Calvinist view of man and God, see Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, chap. 1; and see Mark Valeri, "New Divinity and the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 46, no. 4 (Oct. 1989): 741–69. For a fine example of a darker reading of the beliefs of the Founding Fathers, see Richard Hofstadter's opening chapter in *The American Political Tradition* (New York, 1948). The reader may feel that it is inappropriate, in discussing a work written in the 1780s, to cite a Jonathan Edwards sermon from the 1730s, but several historians and biographers of our own day seem reluctant to recognize the degree to which JA had escaped the religious dread that had dominated New England during the lifetimes of his grandfather (1654–1737) and father (1692–1761).

53. JA, *Works*, 4:407 (letter XXVI, p.130). See chap. 9, sect. 2, on JA's "Discourses on Davila."

54. JA, *Works*, 4:408–14 (letter XXVI, pp. 131–40). In his constitution's Preamble, JA states: "The body politic is formed by a voluntary association of individuals: It is a social compact, by which the whole people covenants with each citizen, and each citizen with the whole people, that all shall be governed by certain laws for the common good" (*PJA*, 8:237). Harrington's image of the girls dividing the cake, drawn from his *Oceana*, appears in *Works* at 4:411 and 412 (letter XXVI, pp. 135 and 137).

55. In the table of contents to volume 1 of the *Defence* (p. xxxi), "Mixed Governments" appears above letter XXVII (combining the two letters numbered XXVII in the text, labeled "Machiavel" and "Sidney") and letter XXVIII ("Montesquieu"). Letter XXIX, entitled "Harrington" in the table of contents, but not in the body of the volume, appears as the first of six letters under the heading "Ancient Republics, and Opinions of Philosophers," but its mid-seventeenth-century argument is more consistent with the three letters preceding it. The second letter numbered XXVII (JA, *Works*, 4:420–23; *Defence*, 1:148–52), a collection of short, discontinuous passages from Algernon Sidney's *Discourses Concerning Government* (written, c. 1682; published, 1698), is the least important of the four letters, in part because Sidney was a less-focused thinker and writer than Machiavelli, Montesquieu, or Harrington, and briefly touched on too many governments to consider any one effectively. But like the other writers, he was in perfect agreement with JA on the virtues of mixed government.

56. JA, *Works*, 4:416–20 (letter XXVII, pp. 141–47). The date of Machiavelli's *Discourses* given in the text, like that of several other works that appear below in this chapter, is that of its first publication in its original language. Machiavelli's attempt to break the cyclical nature of governmental rise and decline is a central theme of J. G. A. Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, 1975), a magisterial treatment of the Florentine's political thought.

57. JA, *Works*, 4:423–27 (letter XXVIII, pp. 153–58).

58. JA, *Works*, 4:427–34, quote at p. 427 (letter XXIX, pp. 158–69, quote at p. 158).

59. JA, *Works*, 4:428 (letter XXIX, p. 159). JA revised his argument, placing the advantages of birth above wealth, in his 1814–15 letters to John Taylor of Caroline; see chap. 10, sect. 6.

60. JA, *Works*, 4:434 (letter XXIX, pp. 168–69).

61. JA, *Works*, 4:435–40 (letter XXX, pp. 169–76). The most distinguished Roman author to write extensively on government was JA's great hero, Cicero, but the text of his principal constitutional work, *De Republica*, was largely lost, and the transmission of the ancient republican tradition to medieval Italy fell to Livy.

62. JA, *Works*, 4:440–48, see JA's critiques at pp. 443–45, and 447–48 (letters XXXI and XXXII, pp. 177–88; JA's critiques at pp. 181–83 and 187–88).

63. JA, *Works*, 4:448–61 (letter XXXIII, pp. 188–207). See sect. 1, above, for AA's remark, and *Works*, 4:463 (letter LIV, p. 365), for Plato "wild as . . . Bedlam."

64. JA, *Works*, 4:448, 449 (quotations) (letter XXXIII, pp. 188–89, 190, quotations at p. 190).

65. JA, *Works*, 4:448 (quotation), 449–61 (letter XXXIII, pp. 189, 189–207, quotation at p. 189).

66. JA, *Works*, 4:461, 462 (letter XXXIV, pp. 207, 208). Xenophon's "Kingdom of Persia" was presumably the concluding section of his *Cyropaedeia*, which gives an idealistic—and largely imaginary—account of the government of Cyrus the Great, founder of the Persian Empire. In this early fourth-century BCE didactic work, which was roughly contemporaneous with Plato's *Republic* (whose disapproval of democracy Xenophon shared), Cyrus's government is modeled largely on Sparta's militaristic aristocracy.

67. On Sir Thomas Smith (1513–77), see *DNB*, 18:532–35; quotation at p. 535; and *ODNB*, 51:324–30.

68. JA, *Works*, 4:469–578 (letters XXXV–LII, pp. 210–361). C. F. Adams combined the material in letters XXXVI and LII, both on Rome, and placed them at the end of this section.

69. Because the number of monarchies, tyrannies, aristocratic oligarchies, and democracies in the ancient word constantly fluctuated and the form of government of most small city-states is unknown, no exact proportion of these different types of government can be determined. JA's discussion of eleven city-states that he labeled democracies (although some were clearly not), and just three that he called aristocracies, could give the impression that democracies were far more common than they were. One scholar, in a recent survey of 164 Greek city-states whose forms of government are known, counted 54 monarchies and tyrannies, 89 oligarchies, and just 21 democracies (Josiah Ober, *Democracy and Knowledge: Innovation and Learning in Classical Athens* [Princeton, 2008], 43–45, 290, table 2D).

70. Jefferson to JA, 23 Feb. 1787, *PTJ*, 11:177; Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, chap. 5.

71. The text of JA's letter on Athens is in *Works*, 4:472–92 (letter XLII, pp. 260–85). Every prominent Greek dramatist, its most distinguished historians, and its greatest

philosophers of the classical era were either native-born citizens of Athens's democracy or in two cases, Herodotus and Aristotle, did a great part of their work there. Josiah Ober, in *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule* (Princeton, 1998), argues that much of the work of four of the greatest of these writers—Aristophanes, Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle—was directly dependent on that democracy because they were all critics, in greater or lesser degree, of that system of government. (It is worth noting that JA's shorter treatment of Athens embedded in his long critique of Marchamont Nedham in volume 3 of the *Defence* [*Works*, 6:100–103], while not of high quality, is far superior to this letter.)

72. C. F. Adams's notes appear on pp. 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 486, 489, 490, and 491 of JA, *Works* (vol. 4). The majority of these either quibbled with some statement in JA's text or flatly rejected it. The younger Adams based his notes on early nineteenth-century German scholarship, and on the great mid-nineteenth-century British historian of ancient Greece, George Grote. Together these men began the work, now more active than ever nearly two centuries later, of critically examining Athenian government and culture.

73. See Jennifer T. Roberts, *Athens on Trial: The Antidemocratic Tradition in Western Thought* (Princeton, 1994); Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton, 1989).; and Ober, *Democracy and Knowledge*.

74. See Mogens Herman Hansen, *Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State* (Oxford, 2006); and Ober, *Democracy and Knowledge*, 85–86. On Braintree, see chap. 1, and Cook, *Fathers of the Towns*.

75. Ober, *Democracy and Knowledge*, 43–55. The only Greek city-states larger in area were Syracuse and Sparta. Athens may have been the most populous of all city-states at the height of its power in the fifth century BCE. Massachusetts's three commercial coastal counties, Essex, Suffolk, and Plymouth, and near-coastal Middlesex, had together at least twice the area of Athens, but probably no more than 200,000 inhabitants in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. It is worth noting that Charles Francis Adams sensed a certain similarity between democratic Athens and the Massachusetts of his day; see JA, *Works*, 4:478n.

76. See chap. 2, sect. 6, on JA's brief praise of democracy in his notes for his oration at Braintree in 1772. Machiavelli criticized Solon for establishing democracy in his *Discourses,* and JA quotes the passage in his first letter numbered XXVII (JA, *Works*, 4:419; *Defence*, 1:145).

77. JA, *Works*, 4:579 (letter LIII, p. 362).

78. JA, *Works*, 4:579 (letter LIII, pp. 362–63); Jefferson to Adams, 23 Feb. 1787, *PJA*, 11:177; and see David C. Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence, KN, 2003).

79. JA, *Works*, 4:463–68 (letter LIV, pp. 365–71) and note at *Works*, 4:463–64. JA quotes from Milton's *Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1656), and Hume's *Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth* (1740–41).

80. JA, *Works*, 4:581–85 (letter LV, pp. 372–78).

81. JA, *Works*, 4:581–82 (letter LV, pp. 372–74), on the army; 4:582–83 (letter LV, pp. 374–75), on provincial congresses.

82. JA, *Works*, 4:587–88 (letter LV, pp. 381–82). C. F. Adams lets JA's concluding "is made appear to all" stand without correction.

83. JA, *Works*, 4:283–84 (Preface, pp. i–iii), quotations at *Works*, 4:284 (Preface, p. ii). AA left London for Bath on 21 December, the day that JA completed his last letter (LV)

in the *Defence*; she was still there when he completed the Preface on 1 January 1787. The first volume was printed immediately, and several copies went to America with a Capt. Cushing on 20 January 1787. See AA to JA, 23 and 30 Dec. 1786; JA to AA, 25 (2 letters), and 27 Dec. 1786; AA to Mary Smith Cranch and to Elizabeth Smith Shaw, both 20 Jan. 1787, and AA to Cotton Tufts, 24 Jan. 1787, *AFC*, 7:410–16, 450, 453, and 454.

84. JA, *Works*, 4:285–93 (Preface, pp. iv–xiv); quotations at *Works*, 4:290 and 292 (Preface, pp. xi, xiii, and xiii–xiv).

85. JA, *Works*, 4:293–98 (Preface, pp. xiv–xxii); quotations at *Works*, 4:293–94 and 293 (Preface, pp. xv and xiv). In *Works*, 4:293, C. F. Adams, in keeping with his transforming JA's letters into chapters, altered "to lay before the gentleman to whom they are addressed" to "to lay before the public."

86. JA, *Works*, vols. 5 and 6. See *AFC*, 8:5, 32, 36, 185, and 186n, on the dates of the beginning and completion of these volumes; and Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 308n3, for the portion of each volume that is direct quotation.

87. JA, *Works*, 5:3–490 (entire volume). JA treated just three republics, Florence, Sienna, and Bologna, in his volume 2 (*Works*, 5:3–332). Five others, Pistoia, Cremona, Padua, Mantua, and Montepulciano, fill the first two-fifths of his volume 3 (*Works*, 5:333–490).

88. JA to Rush, 2 Dec. 1788, in *Old Family Letters Copied from the Originals for Alexander Biddle* (Philadelphia, 1888), 29; JA, *Works*, 6:5 (C. F. Adams's note).

89. On Marchamont Nedham, also spelled Needham (1620–78), see *DNB*, 14:159–64, and *ODNB*, 40:318–23. His loyalties and ideology—appropriately for the editor of a journal entitled *Mercurius Politicus*—changed several times during his career. He was an ardent parliamentarian in the mid-1640s; briefly a royalist at the end of that decade; a supporter of mixed government and an admirer of Machiavelli's *Discourses* in the early 1650s; and a radical democrat in the mid-1650s, a stance he shared with his good friend, John Milton, after both men had become disillusioned with Oliver Cromwell.

90. JA, *Works*, 6:1–216 (vol. 3, letter VI, pp. 209–501). C. F. Adams inserted italicized headings in the left margin for "errors" five through eight (*Works*, 6:170, 177, 181, and 182), and for "rule" one (p. 184), but the beginnings of JA's replies to several of Nedham's fourteen reasons that supported his argument, of his nine rules of policy, and of his eight cautions cannot be determined without consulting Nedham's text. JA divided his treatment of Nedham's six objections by taking up Nedham's eight errors after objection one. To group his commentary on Nedham's objections together, C. F. Adams moved up the material in *Defence*, 3:437–56, to precede that in 3:404–36 (*Works*, 6:145–60, 161–84).

91. Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 130.

92. JA, *Works*, 6:210–11 (vol. 3, letter VI, pp. 493–95).

93. JA, *Works*, 6:217 (letter VII, pp. 502, 503).

94. JA, *Works*, 6:218 (letter VII, pp. 503–4).

95. JA, *Works*, 6:219–20 (letter VII, pp. 504–6). JA may have written this last section of letter VII, a single paragraph in the original edition, well after the preceding material. In a draft of a letter of 5 October 1787 to Cotton Tufts, AA states that JA's "3d vol is just going to the press"; her draft was dated 4 October, the anniversary of JA's dateline to letter I of the first volume of the *Defence* (*AFC*, 8:185, 186n). JA probably did not receive a copy of the U.S. Constitution until early November (see AA to Cotton Tufts, 6 Nov. 1787, *AFC*, 8:203).

96. See sect. 2, above; and Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 102-6, on JA's hopes and fears for French political reform from 1786 to 1789. JA did have one more audience for the *Defence*, in Great Britain, where it was first published. And the work did have both

prominent admirers, including Dr. Richard Price and Joseph Priestly, and vocal critics in that country. But JA had never directed his argument at the British, and had made only modest suggestions for parliamentary reform (JA, *Works*, 4:358; *Defence*, 1:70 [letter XX]) to bring Britain into full conformity with his political principles. See Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 256–57.

97. Jefferson to JA, 23 Feb. 1787, *PTJ*, 11:177; Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 257–58, on French admirers of the *Defence* from 1789 to 1795; and Joyce Appleby, "The Jefferson-Adams Rupture and the First French Translation of John Adams' *Defence*," *American Historical Review* 73 (1967): 1084–91. The first French edition omitted JA's treatment of medieval Italian republics because his text was almost entirely quoted from Italian historians whose work was readily available in Europe.

Chapter IX. John Adams's Republic in Republican America, 1787–1800

Epigraphs: AFC, 8:12; JA, *Works*, 6:420–21.

1. On JA and AA's arrival in Boston, see *D&A*, 3:216–17n, and *AFC*, 8:277, 278. New Hampshire ratified the Constitution on 21 June, Virginia on 25 June, and New York on 26 July 1788. The *Defence* had the greatest potential to influence Massachusetts's delegates who ratified the Constitution in the winter of 1788, but there is no evidence that it did so, and JA himself seems to have been unsure of the good effect of the work soon after he returned to America (Pauline Maier, *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787–1788* [New York, 2010]; JA to Benjamin Rush, 2 Dec. 1788, *Old Family Letters Copied from the Originals for Alexander Biddle* [Philadelphia, 1888], 28–29).

2. C. Bradley Thompson's *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty* (Lawrence, KS, 1998), chap. 12, gives a succinct summary of America's initial reception of the *Defence* but repeats uncritically the praise by some of JA's friends and admirers, who evidently did not read the volume with care, and is too dismissive of others who criticized JA's argument. An example of premature praise of the *Defence*—in light of the writer's opinion just two years later—is Benjamin Rush to JA, 2 July 1788, in *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, ed. L. H. Butterfield (Princeton, 1951), 1:468; see sect. 4, and n. 76, below. The one pamphlet that directly criticized the *Defence* in 1787 was *Observations on Government, Including Some Animadversions on Mr. Adams' Defence of the Constitutions* (New York, 1787), by "A New Jersey Farmer" [John Stephens]; see Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1969), 583–84.

3. See chap. 6, sect. 2, on the brief resurgence of support for executive authority in several states in the late 1770s; and Wood, *Creation of the Republic*, on the transformation of republican thought in the 1780s.

4. *D&A*, 3:211n (JA's decision to return to America).

5. On JA's previous attempts to leave public life, see chap. 7, sect. 4.

6. On 6 June 1788, the Massachusetts legislature appointed JA to the next session of Congress, to begin in November. On the possibility that JA might serve as governor of Massachusetts—despite the obvious difficulty of unseating the popular John Hancock—or as the federal chief justice, see *AFC*, 8:282, 292, 295, and 320n; and Jonathan Trumbull Jr. to George Washington, 28 Oct. 1788, *PGW*, 1:79–82.

7. See Jack Warren, "In the Shadow of Washington: John Adams as Vice President," in Richard Alan Ryerson, ed., *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic* (Boston, 2001), 124–25. It is possible that JA told no one outside his family that he was willing to serve as vice president but relied entirely on the tradition of silently standing for office. It seems even more likely that he told no one, in or out of the family, that he would not serve.

8. Warren, "In the Shadow of Washington," 120–24.

9. JA to AA2, 16 July 1788, *AFC*, 8:279.

10. See *AFC*, 8:305, for JA's refusal to signal any eagerness to become vice president. On the relationship of Generals Lincoln and Knox to JA and to Washington, see Warren, "In the Shadow of Washington," 123–25. It is not certain that Knox sounded out JA on serving with Washington, but he did visit JA in late October or early November, and JA found his visit pleasing (*AFC*, 8:305).

11. JA received the votes of all the electors in just two states, Massachusetts and New Hampshire; split the votes with several other prominent figures, most notably John Jay, in four states: Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia; and received no electoral votes in Delaware, Maryland, South Carolina, and Georgia (*Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America*, vol. 1, *Senate Legislative Journal*, ed. Linda Grant De Pauw et al. [Baltimore, 1972], 8). For the efforts to keep JA's electoral votes down by Hamilton and others in Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, see Merrill Jensen et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the First Federal Elections, 1788–1790* (Madison, WI, 1976–89), 2:47, 50, 230–31, 233, 401–4, 406, and 408; Benjamin Rush to JA, 4 June 1789, in *Letters of Rush*, 1:514; JA to Rush, 9 June 1789, *Old Family Letters*, 37; and JA, *Works*, 6:542–43, and 8:484–85n.

12. On JA's early awareness of the unpopularity of his republican thought, see Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 91, and 298n3, citing letters by JA to James Warren and Benjamin Franklin, both in January 1787. Warren, "In the Shadow of Washington," 117–20, discusses the uncertainty of the new government over the proper character of the vice presidency.

13. Basic sources for JA's role in the executive titles controversy include *First Federal Congress*, vol. 1, *Senate Legislative Journal*, and vol. 9, *The Diary of William Maclay and Other Notes on Senate Debates* (Baltimore, 1988); JA to William Tudor, 28 June 1789, Adams Papers, reel 115; Benjamin Rush to JA, 4 June and 21 July 1789, *Letters of Rush*, 1:513–15, 522–25; JA to Rush, 9 June, and 5, 24, and 28 July 1789, *Old Family Letters*, 36–38, 41–51; James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, 23 May 1789 (*PTJ*, 15:147–48; Jefferson's reply of 29 July 1789 is at 15:315–16). Treatments of this episode include John R. Howe, *The Changing Political Thought of John Adams* (Princeton, 1966), 176–82; James H. Hutson Jr., "John Adams and the Titles Campaign," *New England Quarterly* 41 (1968): 34–41; Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York, 1993), 46–50; Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 266–68; and Warren, "In the Shadow of Washington," 128–31. See *First Federal Congress*, 1:21–24 (21, 23 Apr.), on JA's oath, and the appointment of the titles committee; and 9:4–5 (24 Apr.), on JA's first involvement in the issue; Maclay, at 9:4, states that JA himself made the initial motion to name a titles committee. JA, in his letter to "A Recluse Man," 19 Jan. 1792 (JA, *Works*, 8:511–13), assigns himself a more modest role.

14. *First Federal Congress*, 1:37, 40–45 (7–14 May); 9:10, 16–19, 23, 27–33, 38–40 (1, 8, 9, 11, and 14 May). See also JA to George Washington, 17 May 1789, *PGW*, 2:312–14.

15. Unlike JA, Vice President Johnson did not claim a right to speak freely from the chair on all issues before the Senate. But as that body's immediately previous majority leader (1953–60)—and its most powerful and effective majority leader in many years—he sought to hold on to his legislative power by continuing as chair of the Senate's Democratic Conference. He did secure this position, but his former colleagues quickly made it clear that his role would be strictly ceremonial—like his role as presiding officer in the Senate—and he soon ceased attending caucus sessions (Robert Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, vol. 3, *Master of the Senate* [New York, 2002], chap. 43). The vice presi-

dency remained a largely empty office until the last quarter of the twentieth century, when presidents began assigning their vice presidents more substantial executive tasks, and relying more frequently on their political advice.

16. Senator Maclay's diary states that the title, "[His/Your] Excellency," commonly used for royal governors and for the chief executives of several of the new American states, including Massachusetts, was favored by some senators who objected to more elevated labels, but by then the issue had become too polarized for such a compromise (*First Federal Congress*, 1:40 [8 May]; 9:39 [14 May]). See Gordon S. Wood, "Monarchism and Republicanism in Early America," chap. 8 in his *The Idea of America: Reflections on the Birth of the United States* (New York, 2011), on Washington's initial approval of an executive title. On a few occasions Washington did seek JA's counsel: on presidential accessibility in 1789; on America's response to a possible threat to its neutrality and territorial sovereignty in the Nootka Sound controversy between Britain and Spain in 1790; and on the activities of Citizen Genêt in 1794 (see JA, *Works*, 8:489–93, 496–500, and 515). For a fuller exploration of the impact of the executive titles controversy on JA's relations with President Washington, see Warren, "In the Shadow of Washington," 129–33.

17. See Page Smith, *John Adams* (New York, 1962), 2:753–58; John Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (Knoxville, TN, 1992), 301–4; and Elkins and McKitrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 46–48.

18. Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 267–68, quotes JA to Rush, 24 and 5 July 1789, and offers the fullest summary and most positive view of JA's reasons for favoring an executive title. See also JA to "A Recluse Man," cited in n. 13, above.

19. See chaps. 5, 6, and 8, for JA's insistence on protecting the executive in 1775, 1779, and 1787–88. JA succinctly expressed his fear of aristocracy in a republic in his 6 December 1787 letter to Thomas Jefferson (*PTJ*, 12:396–97, quoted at the head of chap. 8), and in that letter he stated, shortly after having read the Constitution for the first time, that he would not have given the Senate the power to approve presidential appointments.

20. Madison to Jefferson, 23 May 1789, and Jefferson to Madison, 29 July 1789, *PTJ*, 15:146–47, 315–16.

21. See "Roger Sherman," in *ANB*, 19:816–19.

22. "Roger Sherman," *ANB*, 19:817–18; Abigail Adams recorded the epithet "Father Sherman" in her letter to Cotton Tufts of 30 May 1790 (*AFC*, 9:64).

23. See *D&A*, vols. 2 and 3, and the index in vol. 4, for JA's remarks, both in his diary and his autobiography, on Sherman as a congressional colleague, primarily in 1775–76.

24. The 1789 exchange between Sherman and JA first appeared in print in 1851, in JA, *Works*, 6:427–42 (see 6:409). The quotation from Sherman's initial letter (not found) appears in JA's first reply, of 17 July 1789 (*Works*, 6:427). JA reveals his keen interest in the relationship between the president and the Senate at just this time in his diary notes on the Senate's debate of 15 July on the president's removal powers (*D&A*, 3:217–21). Following that debate, JA cast the tie-breaking vote to confirm the president's untrammeled right to remove his appointees (JA to James Lovell, 1 Sept. 1789, *Works*, 8:493–95). Sherman's opening letter to JA, probably written on 16 or 17 July, could have been prompted by some remarks by JA on 15 July, either in the Senate chamber or just outside it, that were relayed to congressman Sherman, and Sherman and JA might have recently discussed the issue privately. On Washington's reservations about the separation of powers, see Warren, "In the Shadow of Washington," 126–27, 139n27.

25. JA, *Works*, 6:428.

26. As I have done earlier (see introduction, sect. 3; chap. 4, n. 5; chap. 6, sect. 4, at n. 77; and chap. 8, sect. 4), I employ the phrase "the whole people" to stand for the entire population that had some share in making political decisions, from the wealthiest and most influential to the meanest who possessed any right of political consent. My "the whole people" differs from JA's usual use of "the people" by including both "the Few" (an aristocracy) and "the Many"; JA's "the people" more commonly indicated only "the Many."

One should note, however, that in his 1779 draft of the Massachusetts constitution, JA did not restrict the electorate of the lower house to "the common people"; all free adult males who met the minimum property qualifications could vote for representatives, no matter how wealthy they were. This same electorate could also vote for the more aristocratic senators, and for the governor. In socioeconomic terms, the distinction between these officials was expressed in the varying property qualifications for holding their offices, not in any difference in their electorates. In JA's mind, however, in Massachusetts and in any sound republic, the two houses existed to express the views and interests of two distinct socioeconomic classes.

27. JA, *Works*, 6:430. Note how closely the geographic details and the terms for chief executive in this passage follow JA's *Defence of the Constitutions*, vol. 1, letters iii–xxiii (see chap. 8, sect. 4).

28. JA, *Works*, 6:430–31. JA first stated this conviction in his letter of 4 November 1779, to Elbridge Gerry (*PJA*, 8:276–77), quoted at the head of chap. 6; see also JA to Thomas Jefferson, 6 Dec. 1787, cited in n. 19, above. On the use of the veto in the early republic, see sect. 5, and n.90 below.

29. Sherman to JA, 20 July; JA, *Works*, 6:438 (quotation), 439.

30. JA to Sherman, [20 July 1789]; Sherman to JA, [20+ July 1789], JA, *Works*, 6:432–36, 440–42.

31. Wood, "Monarchism and Republicanism," 231–49.

32. A large portion of JA's *Discourses on Davila* survives in manuscript; drafts of seventeen of the thirty-two essays first published in 1790–91, and one essay, the thirty-third, that has never been published, are in Adams Papers, Microfilms, reel 374. Of the thirty-two essays published in John Fenno's *Gazette of the United States* under the heading, "Discourses on Davila," the first twenty-two appeared in New York between April and October 1790, and the last ten in Philadelphia between November 1790 and April 1791. The essays were unsigned, but JA was always known to be their author. *Discourses on Davila. A Series of Papers on Political History. By an American Citizen. Written in the Year 1790, and then Published in the Gazette of the United States* (Boston, 1805), opened with a short advertisement and a brief introduction by an unidentified author, to which was appended a quotation from Bolingbroke's *Remarks on the History of England*, supplied by JA. It contained thirty-one of the essays in Fenno's *Gazette*, omitting only the last; had several paragraph breaks not found in the *Gazette*; and included a postscript (see n. 54, below). In 1973, Da Capo Press of New York reprinted this edition in facsimile.

In 1851, Charles Francis Adams used JA's personal copy of the 1805 edition to republish the text in the sixth volume of his grandfather's *Works* (6:221–403) and added his own brief introduction. He also rearranged the early essays and included several marginal notes made by JA in 1812 and 1813, along with a brief appendix containing two addresses to the Emperor Napoleon, with the emperor's replies, also from 1812 and 1813, to which two of JA's marginal comments had referred. The text of JA's thirty-second "Davila" essay was only republished a century later, in Alfred Iacuzzi, *John Adams* [,]

Scholar (New York, 1952), 266–67. (The title of Iacuzzi's study has no punctuation; consistent with several of his chapter titles, I will hereafter refer to the work as *John Adams, Scholar*.)

Commentary on *Davila* includes Zoltan Haraszti, *John Adams & the Prophets of Progress* (Cambridge, MA, 1952), chap. 10; Iacuzzi, *John Adams, Scholar*, chaps. 8 and 9; and Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, chaps. 5 and 8. In the text and notes of the present work I will use "Discourses," "Davila," or "Discourses on Davila" whenever I refer to JA's essays in Fenno's *Gazette*. When referring by a single-word title to the collected *Discourses on Davila*—whether to the 1805 or the 1851 text—I will italicize *Discourses* and *Davila*. Wherever Davila appears in roman type in my text, without quotation marks, it will always refer to the Italian historian.

33. Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 93, 96, and 298–99n12, calls *Davila* the fourth volume of JA's *Defence*, citing JA letters to John Taylor in 1814 and to Jefferson in 1813, although his letters to Jefferson do not say that he regards *Davila* as the fourth volume of his *Defence* (*PTJ, Retirement Series*, 5:287, 296). The publishers of the 1805 edition of *Davila* first labeled it "an additional volume" to the *Defence* in their prefatory "Advertisement."

34. JA, *Works*, 6:228. See Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 96, on a possible motive for *Davila*; and *AFC*, 9:263–64n. For comments on Enrico Davila and his relationship to JA's *Discourses*, see JA, *Works*, 6:227n; Haraszti, *Prophets of Progress*, chap. 10, and p. 334n; Iacuzzi, *John Adams, Scholar*, chap. 8; and Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 117–19, 126, and chap. 8.

35. JA, *Works*, 6:225; Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, chap. 5. In his *Quatre Lettres d'un Bourgeois de New Haven, sur l'Unité de la Législation* [Four Letters by a Citizen of New Haven, on the Unity of Legislation] (Paris 1789), Condorcet called himself *un Bourgeois de New Haven* because that Connecticut town had recently made him an honorary citizen.

36. JA, *Works*, 6:252 (essay vi), 270 (essay xi), 276 (essay xii), 280 (essay xiii), and 391–92 (essay xxxi). All significant references to the French Revolution in *Davila* appear in essays xi, xii, xiii, and xxxi; JA directly addresses the French in essay xiii (*Works*, 6:276). Haraszti, *Prophets of Progress*, 165, asserts that JA turned to Davila's *Historia* in the fall of 1789 "in despair over the news of the French Revolution," but gives no evidence for this statement.

37. JA, *Works*, 6:228n, 272 and 272n. In his unpublished thirty-third essay, however, JA finally took up Condorcet's *Quatre Lettres*, and there he was fully as critical of the *philosophe's* argument as one would expect (Adams Papers, Microfilms, reel 374).

38. JA, *Works*, 6:231, 228. Some discerning readers of "Davila" may have tied the phrase "unite in his single person *all the authority of the nation*" with Turgot's "all authority in one centre, the nation," which had prompted JA to begin his *Defence of the Constitutions* in 1786, but JA did not make this connection explicit until he wrote his marginal note to this passage in 1812 (6:228n). All words and phrases italicized in quotations in this section are italicized in the 1851 text of *Davila*.

39. JA, *Works*, 6:228.

40. JA, *Works*, 6:232. On the original order of JA's essays and the revised order in the 1851 edition, see Haraszti, *Prophets of Progress*, 168, and Iacuzzi, *John Adams, Scholar*, 284n4.

41. JA, *Works*, 6:232–81 (essays ii–xiii), and 6:281–392 (essays xiv–xxxi).

42. JA, *Works*, 6:232–34.

43. JA, *Works*, 6:234.

44. JA, *Works*, 6:235–40; quotations at p. 235 and 239.

45. JA, *Works*, 6:241–48; quotations at p. 245 and 248. The triumph of Lucius Aemelius Paulus "Macedonicus," who defeated king Perseus in 168 BCE, was a familiar story in Roman history. It appears twice in *Davila*, here in the fourth essay, and again in the eighth essay, as part of JA's long quotation from Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, where Smith employs it to make a somewhat different point.

46. JA, *Works*, 6:248–66; quotations at pp. 248–49, 257–62 (from *Moral Sentiments*), and 264–66 (Pope and Shakespeare). JA does not identify the "great writer" (*Works*, 6:257) who supplied nearly the entire text of the eighth essay and inspired several other early essays in "Davila." Charles Francis Adams (*Works*, 6:262) locates the long passage in Smith's *Moral Sentiments*, at "vol i, pp. 125–141." Haraszti, *Prophets of Progress*, 169–70, compares several shorter passages from *Moral Sentiments* with JA's paraphrases of them.

47. JA, *Works*, 6:267–70; quotation at p. 269. JA does not identify the "Political Geography" published in London and recently republished in American newspapers (*Works*, 6:267). A note in *Works*, 6:269, by C. F. Adams identifies the speaker on the floor of Congress in 1776 as JA.

48. JA, *Works*, 6:270. In his carefully composed list of ten prominent French names, JA begins with two families that contended for royal power—which the Bourbons finally won two decades after the period covered in the *Discourses on Davila*—in many of the long passages that he quoted from Enrico Davila's history. He then proceeds to four eminent eighteenth-century noble families, including the La Fayettes, whose best-known member was both a hero in America's War for Independence and a central figure in the early stages of the French Revolution. Next came Necker and Calonne, two ministers of finance in the fiscally desperate last years of Louis XVI's reign. He ends with two prominent figures in the French Revolution who were still leaders in the National Assembly while he was writing "Davila": the popular and controversial orator, the Comte de Mirabeau, who died suddenly in 1791; and Jean-Sylvain Bailly, a distinguished astronomer who served as president of the Third Estate at the opening of the Estates General in 1789 and was Mayor of Paris as JA composed his essays.

49. JA, *Works*, 6:270–74; quotations at pp. 270–71, 274 (Dr. Price).

50. JA, *Works*, 6:274–81; quotations at pp. 274, 274–75, 275, and 276.

51. JA, *Works*, 6:276–81; quotations at pp. 276–78, 280, 279, and 281.

52. Both Haraszti, *Prophets of Progress*, 168, and Iacuzzi, *John Adams, Scholar*, 150–52, identify the particular volumes in Davila's *Historia* on which JA commented and show how much of the historian's work he had still to cover as he reached the spring of 1791.

53. JA, *Works*, 6:391–98; quotations at pp. 392 and 393.

54. JA, *Works*, 6:394–98; quotations at pp. 394, 397, and 397–98. On its last page (248), in smaller typeface, the 1805 edition added a "Postscript," which Charles Francis Adams reprinted verbatim (*Works*, 6:398–99). JA may have written this postscript, but no evidence survives to determine its authorship. It says nothing about Enrico Davila's *History*, and little about the psychology of human passions, but it does briefly discuss the constitutional history of England in terms similar to those found in JA's letter to Samuel Adams of 18 October 1790 (see sect. 3 below). The postscript concludes with an exhortation to secure liberty by preserving a republican balance in government.

55. Iacuzzi, *John Adams, Scholar*, 266–67 (JA's thirty-second letter); quotation at p. 267.

56. Iacuzzi, *John Adams, Scholar*, 267; and see JA to AA, 19 Mar. 1776, *AFC*, 1:363, quoted in chap. 5, sect.2, on JA's characterization of the author of *Common Sense*. Iacuzzi

discusses Stephen Boethius in his chap. 9. JA's translation of Boethius extended from 30 April to 8 July 1791 in the *Gazette*. Because he was in Braintree from May into the fall, JA probably left his translation with Fenno before his departure from Philadelphia. Nothing is known about why a full translation was not published or, indeed, if JA ever finished it.

57. Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 118–19; and C. Bradley Thompson, "John Adams's Machiavellian Moment," *Review of Politics* 57 (1995): 389–417. At JA, *Works*, 6:297, in keeping with the dominant sentiment of his entire text, JA entered two marginal comments, probably in 1813, which equated the behavior of the queen regent, Catherine de Medici, whom he clearly did not admire, with that of her major opponents, and concluded that religious differences were mere pretexts for the ambitions of all parties in France's civil wars.

58. Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, chap. 1, effectively argues that JA rejected a Calvinist world-view in his twenties. I stress this point here, as I have in chap. 8, at n. 52, because some historians persist in seeing JA as a neo-Puritan. While this view is congruent with his work habits and personal rectitude, as Edmund Morgan memorably argued over half a century ago ("John Adams and the Puritan Tradition," *New England Quarterly* 34 [1961]: 518–29), it is sharply at odds with his more secular beliefs about both Christian theology and human nature.

59. JA, *Works*, 6:272. JA's use of "Jacobinical" in this 1813 note would not have occurred when he composed his "Davila" essays in 1790 and 1791, before the rise of the Jacobin faction to power in the French National Assembly.

60. JA, *Works*, 6:405–36, prints four letters that JA exchanged with Samuel Adams that fall, with an editorial introduction; they were first published in Boston in 1802 as *Four Letters: Being an Interesting Correspondence between Those Eminently Distinguished Characters, John Adams, Late President of the United States; and Samuel Adams, Late Governor of Massachusetts, On the Important Subject of Government*. Samuel Adams's initial letter to JA, of 2 September 1790, not included in *Four Letters*, was omitted from *Works*; it is in Adams Papers, Microfilms, reel 374. The quotation, from *Works*, 6:411–12, evokes a similar mood to JA's 1811 remark to Benjamin Rush, quoted at the end of this study.

61. JA, *Works*, 6:412–14.

62. JA, *Works*, 6:415, 416.

63. JA, *Works*, 6:417, 418.

64. JA, *Works*, 6:418–19.

65. JA, *Works*, 6:420.

66. JA, *Works*, 6:420–26; quotation at pp. 420–21.

67. The most convenient primary source for this episode and its immediate political consequences is *PTJ*, 20:268–313, which includes a dozen letters exchanged between Jefferson and several political allies, and with Washington and JA, extending from 26 April 1791 to 19 June 1792. Editor Julian Boyd prefaces this correspondence with an informative "Editorial Note" (pp. 268–90) that places the Jefferson-Adams incident within the larger Paine-Burke controversy. Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 266, 269–74, regards Jefferson's endorsement of Paine's *Rights of Man* as the first major public criticism of JA's constitutional ideas. He also questions, but does not flatly reject, Jefferson's assertions that he never intended his remark about "political heresies" to be published (pp. 271–72).

68. See Jefferson to George Washington, 8 May, to James Madison, 9 May, to Thomas Mann Randolph Jr., 3 July, and to James Monroe, 10 July; and Madison to Jefferson, 13 July 1791, *PTJ*, 20:291–94, 295–99. John Quincy Adams's eleven "Publicola"

essays appeared in Boston's *Columbian Centinel* from 8 June to 27 July 1791, while JA was at his home in Braintree for the summer, and thus a plausible author of a series of essays published in Boston. The essays are reprinted in Worthington C. Ford, ed., *Writings of John Quincy Adams* (New York, 1913–17), 1:65–110 (see *PTJ*, 20:280–81).

69. *PTJ*, 20:302–3.

70. *PTJ*, 20:305–8; see JA to Jefferson, 15 July 1813, *PTJ, Retirement Series*, 6:297 ("You and I, ought not to die, before We have explained ourselves to each other."). JA used similar language in 1805, when renewing his correspondence with Dr. Rush (*Old Family Letters*, 61–62). Joseph J. Ellis, *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams* (New York, 1993), chap. 6, explores JA's pattern of ready forgiveness of friends who disagreed with him.

71. *PTJ*, 20:310–12 (emphasis in the original). In *The Spirit of Liberty*, 271, C. Bradley Thompson, on the basis of Jefferson's correspondence with Washington and Madison, properly dismisses as patently untrue Jefferson's 30 August implication that he did not have JA's "Davila" essays in mind when he wrote his note to Smith.

72. See *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 1:252–63.

73. See n. 2, above.

74. "A Customer"'s two letters appeared in the *Poughkeepsie Journal* on 21 May and 20 June. Boyd quotes liberally from both, especially the first, in *PTJ*, 20:300–301, from which the quotations here are taken. Boyd speculates, quite plausibly, that "A Customer" was R. R. Livingston, one of JA's critics during his Dutch and French diplomacy of 1781–83 (see chap. 7). The satiric squib, of which JA complained to Jefferson on 29 July, appeared in the *New Haven Gazette* on 18 May (*PTJ*, 20:305, 307–8, 311). On the importance of "Publicola," see *PTJ*, 20:310–11 (Jefferson), and 280–83 (Boyd's "Editorial Note"). The charge that JA had changed his political views during his years in Europe would appear again in Mercy Otis Warren's *A History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* (Boston, 1805), and more recently in Howe, *Changing Political Thought of John Adams*, chap. 3, and Wood, *Creation of the Republic*, chap. 14. See chap. 7, and chap. 10, sect. 3.

75. Five pseudonymous writers promptly answered "Publicola" in the Boston press (*PTJ*, 20:282–83). "A Customer"'s letters were reprinted in the *New-York Journal* on 2 and 13 July (*PTJ*, 20:300). For further evidence that the attacks on JA predated "Publicola," see Henry Knox to JA, 10 June 1791 (JA, *Works*, 8:503–4).

76. Major private criticisms of the *Defence of the Constitutions* leveled before JA's "Davila" essays and Jefferson's endorsement of Paine's *Rights of Man* were expressed by James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, 6 June 1787, and by Rev. James Madison to James Madison, 11 June 1787, *PJM*, 10:29–30, 44–46; by James Wood Jr., a Virginia presidential elector who voted against JA in 1789 because he knew him "to be an enemy of Genl. Washington, and not a Republican," *First Federal Elections*, 2:406; by Thomas Jefferson (verbally) to Benjamin Rush, March 1790; and by Benjamin Rush to JA, 13 April 1790 (reporting both his and Jefferson's concern over JA's new political opinions), in *Letters of Rush*, 1:544–49. See also James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, 12 May 1791, *PTJ*, 20:294–95, which reveals Madison's deep hostility to JA's *Defence*.

77. JA to AA, 19 Dec. 1793, *AFC*, 9:477. The other memorable characterization of the office was by John Nance Garner, vice president from 1933 to 1941, who said that it was not worth "a pitcher of warm piss" (often refined to "a pitcher of warm spit"); see L. Edward Purcell, ed., *The Vice Presidents: A Biographical Dictionary* (New York, 1998), 296.

78. Warren, "In the Shadow of Washington," 133–34.

79. On Washington's intention to retire in 1793, see Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington, a Biography* (New York, 1954), vol. 6, chap. 16. For "it cannot be done" and "head of wood," see Warren, "In the Shadow of Washington," 117, citing letters of JA to John Quincy Adams, 9 July, and to James Lovell, 14–16 July 1789.

80. See JA to AA, 26 Jan. 1794, and JA to Charles Adams, 17 May 1794, *AFC*, 10:56, 182–83.

81. JA received 77 of the 132 electoral votes. Governor George Clinton of New York, a Democratic Republican, received 50 votes; Thomas Jefferson received 4; and John Jay got just 1 (*Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennial Edition* [Cambridge and New York, 2006], 5:172). On John Quincy Adams's appointment to The Hague, see JA to John Quincy Adams, 26, 29, and 30 May 1794, in *AFC*, 10:192–93, and 197–200; and George Washington to JA, 20 Feb. 1797, in JA, *Works*, 8:529–30.

82. On JA's presidency, see Manning Dauer, *The Adams Federalists* (Baltimore, 1953); Stephen G. Kurtz, *The Presidency of John Adams: The Collapse of Federalism* (Philadelphia, 1957); Ralph Adams Brown, *The Presidency of John Adams* (Lawrence, KS, 1975); and Elkins and McKitrick; *The Age of Federalism*. On his presidential diplomacy, see Alexander De Conde, *The Quasi-War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War with France, 1797–1801* (New York, 1966). On his position in the presidential ranking polls, see Ryerson, ed., *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic*, 17, and 36n43.

83. An excellent introduction to the dynamics of this contest is Joanne B. Freeman, "The Presidential Election of 1796," in Ryerson, *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic*, 142–67.

84. Freeman, "Election of 1796," 142, citing JA to AA, 8, 12, 20, and 27 Dec. 1796 (*AFC*, 11:440–41, 443–45, 450–51, and 462–63; quotations at pp. 440, 444, and 451).

85. See Smith, *John Adams*, 2:903–11; Ferling, *John Adams*, 326–32; and *Historical Statistics*, 5:172. The role of Hamilton and his friends in this election is unclear, in part because, although they favored Pinckney over Adams for the presidency, they did not want to risk having Jefferson become president. See JA to Elbridge Gerry, 13 Feb. 1797 (JA, *Works*, 8:522–24 and 524n1). The sectional pattern of 1796 was primarily a north-south split, but with an east-west cleavage as well. This pattern was largely repeated in 1800. Thereafter, the great majority of presidential elections have shown this same north-south division, again often accompanied by a strong east-west (or more recently, a coastal-interior) component. This durable pattern has persisted across every redefinition and realignment of the nation's major political parties, up to and including the election of 2012.

86. John Gabriel Hunt, ed., *The Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents* (New York, 1997), 3–7, 13–20; and JA, *Works*, 9:106–11.

87. JA, *Works*, 9:106–7.

88. JA to Jefferson, 10 Nov., and 6 Dec. 1787, and Jefferson to JA, 13 Nov. 1787, *PTJ*, 12:335, 396–97, and 350–51 (see my comment in the note to the epigraph in chap. 8); and JA to Roger Sherman, 17, 18, and 20 July 1789, discussed in sect. 1, above.

89. For a rare exception to JA's avoidance of controversial republican themes during his presidency, see his "Address to the Inhabitants of Harrison County, Virginia," 13 Aug. 1798, in JA, *Works*, 9:216–17.

90. The presidential veto played a small role in the politics of the early republic. Washington cast just two vetoes; JA, Jefferson, and John Quincy Adams cast none. Before 1840, only Madison (with seven) and Jackson (twelve) vetoed several bills. But however often it has been employed, the limited veto provided in the Constitution has usually proved a more effective tool of presidential power than JA, who lamented its

weakness, could have imagined. Congress did not override a single veto until 1845; over the full course of American history only 4 percent of all vetoes have been overridden; and twelve presidents were never overridden. A few presidents, however, have fared less well. Congress overrode more than half the vetoes of Franklin Pierce and Andrew Johnson in the nineteenth century, and over the past century, Presidents Wilson, Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and George W. Bush saw more than 10 percent of their vetoes overridden. See *Historical Statistics*, 5:197.

On the Sedition Act of 1798, see James Morton Smith, *Freedom's Fetters: The Alien and Sedition Laws and American Civil Liberties* (Ithaca, NY, 1956). For a sensitive reading of JA's complex relationship with freedom of the press over the course of his career, see Richard D. Brown, "The Disenchantment of a Radical Whig: John Adams Reckons with Free Speech," in Ryerson, *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic*, 171–85. I limit my personal suggestion of a veto that JA should have cast, for his own historical reputation, to the Sedition Act, and omit the Alien Acts, because, while the latter statutes appear in retrospect to be both unnecessary and morally repugnant, they were not clearly unconstitutional except in the eyes of supporters of a strong Jeffersonian states' rights philosophy. The Sedition Act, in contrast, strikes modern American sensibilities, as it did those of many Americans of the 1790s, as a direct violation of the First Amendment, although JA, and virtually all Federalists, did not see it in that light.

91. At age sixty-one on the day of his inauguration, JA was a few years older than all other early presidents before Andrew Jackson, at their respective inaugurations. On the Adamses' frequent bouts of ill health during JA's presidency, see Edith B. Gelles, "'Splendid Misery': Abigail Adams as First Lady," in Ryerson, *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic*, 186–234.

92. See Elkins and McKitrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 732–40. The *Letter of Alexander Hamilton, Concerning the Public Conduct and Character of John Adams, Esq., President of the United States* was published in October 1800.

93. The major candidates of each party not only received identical or—in the case of Adams and Pinckney—nearly identical vote totals; they received identical votes in every state except Rhode Island, which cast 1 vote for Jay rather than for Pinckney. The contending parties split Maryland equally, 5 to 5, and Pennsylvania nearly equally, where Democratic Republicans had the edge, 8 to 7. Adams received 4 of North Carolina's 12 votes. All other votes were unanimous by state, giving Adams 46 votes east of the Delaware River, 15 more north of the Potomac, and only North Carolina's 4 in the South; while Jefferson and Burr received just 12 votes east of the Delaware, 13 more north of the Potomac, and 48 in the South and West. See *Historical Statistics*, 5:172; and Elkins and McKitrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 905.

Chapter X. A Retrospective Retirement, 1801–1826

Epigraph: JA, *Works*, 9:567.

1. But see JA's criticism of Jefferson's presidency in 1804, which he knew might be employed in a public attack on that administration, in private letters to William Cunningham (James Grant, *John Adams: Party of One* [New York, 2005], 434, 447–49; *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:555–56, 600–602). William Cunningham Jr. published this correspondence, without JA's prior knowledge or permission, in 1823. Joseph J. Ellis, *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams* (New York, 1993), 19–25, gives an evocative speculation on JA's inner mood in his last days in office, but his initial assertion (p. 21) that JA did not resent Jefferson in March 1801 is undercut by his own

later assessment (pp. 115–17) of their difficult relationship from 1796 until their reconciliation in 1812.

2. Peter Shaw contrasts JA's and Franklin's autobiographies in *The Character of John Adams* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1976), 278–82, as does Ellis, *Passionate Sage*, 61. See also Herbert S. Sloan, "Presidents as Historians," in Richard Alan Ryerson, ed., *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic* (Boston, 2001), 266–83, who characterizes JA's autobiography as an early example of a small but growing "literature of political disappointment" by public men in Europe and America. Lyman Butterfield supplies a thorough discussion of the composition of JA's autobiography in *D&A*, 1:xliv–xlvi, lxviii–lxxiv.

3. The three sections appear in *D&A*, 3:253–449; 4:1–172; and 4:173–254.

4. *D&A*, 1:xliv.

5. *D&A*, 1:lxxii–lxxiii.

6. JA maintained several long and voluminous correspondences, but with the exception of the longest correspondence of his life, that with his son John Quincy Adams (from 1774 to 1826), no other exchanges were as extended, and none were as substantial, as those with Jefferson, Rush, and his wife. Most of the Adams-Rush correspondence appears in print, under two titles: *Old Family Letters Copied from the Originals for Alexander Biddle* (Philadelphia, 1888), for JA's letters; and *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, ed. L. H. Butterfield (Princeton, 1951), for the doctor's letters. Extensive excerpts from the late correspondence of both men appear in *The Spur of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush, 1805–1813*, ed. John A. Schutz and Douglass Adair (San Marino, CA, 1966).

7. JA's correspondence with Rush through 1785 appears in *PJA*, vols. 5–17; his exchanges with Warren, from 1774 to 1785, and with Lovell, from 1778 to 1785, appear in vols. 3 through 16 of the same series. From 1788 through 1790, JA and Rush exchanged another twenty-six letters, all in *Old Family Letters* and *Letters of Rush*. For their good-natured acceptance of their political differences, see Rush to JA, 4 June and 21 July 1789, and 13 Apr. 1790 (*Letters of Rush*, 1:513–15, 522–25, 544–49), and JA to Rush, 9 June 1789, and 18 Apr. 1790 (*Old Family Letters*, 36–38, 58–61).

8. *D&A*, 3:383. One cannot date the composition of particular passages in JA's autobiography, but JA may have written his first retirement letter to Rush (6 Feb. 1805, *Old Family Letters*, 61), near the time when he made his only mention of Rush in his autobiography, quoted here. This passage falls roughly halfway through the long first section of his autobiography, which JA had resumed in November 1804, and would break off in June 1805.

9. *Spur of Fame*, 20; *Letters of Rush,* 1:lxxi; 2:1138. JA's 1805–13 letters to Rush fill the bulk of *Old Family Letters* (pp. 61–451); Rush's replies to JA dominate vol. 2 of *Letters of Rush* (pp. 890–1193). JA's opening sentence to Rush in 1805 echoes a sentence in his 29 July 1791 letter to Jefferson (chap. 9, n. 70), and anticipates more closely a sentence he would write to Jefferson on 15 July 1813 (*Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:358). On Rush's politics in Pennsylvania in the 1770s, see Richard Alan Ryerson, *The Revolution Is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765–1776* (Philadelphia, 1978), chaps. 7 and 9.

10. *Letters of Rush*, 2:966 (13 June 1808); *Old Family Letters*, 184 (20 June 1808), and see n. 21, below. Rush had first expressed similar feelings to JA in April 1807 (*Letters of Rush*, 1:lxxii; 2:941).

11. Charles Francis Adams, ed., "Correspondence between John Adams and Mercy Warren Relating to Her 'History of the American Revolution,'" *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 5th ser., vol. 4 (1878): 315–511, with additional specimen pages

in facsimile selected from Mercy Otis Warren's *A History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* (Boston, 1805).

12. JA to Mercy Warren, 11 and 20 July 1807 (MHS *Collections*, 4:321–28, 332–54); Warren to JA, 28 July (4:358–66); JA to Warren, 15, 17, and 19 Aug. (4:457–79); and Warren to JA, 1, 7, 15, and 27 Aug. (4:394–99, 416–24, 447–57, and 479–91).

13. JA to Warren, 11 July 1807 (MHS *Collections*, 4:321–24); JA quotes somewhat inaccurately from Warren's *History*, 3:392.

14. MHS *Collections*, 4:324–26 (quotation at p. 326). On p. 324, JA lists thirteen British and continental legal and political writers who shaped his views before he first went to Europe in 1778. Seven of these appear as subjects of serious study in his diary before 1776; three more, including James Harrington, appear in his other writings before 1776 or are placed at points in his narrative autobiography before his departure from America. Just two make their first appearance in his writings during his European service (Jean De Lolme, in the *Defence*), or shortly after it (Adam Smith, in the "Davila" essays). Only one, the early eighteenth-century constitutional writer Roger Acherley, does not appear in JA's writings before this letter to Mercy Warren. See JA, *D&A*, vols. 1–4.

15. Ellis, *Passionate Sage*, 69–75, 183–88, effectively places the emotional character of this correspondence within the larger framework of JA's personality. JA connects the Warrens with Shays's Rebellion and with Jefferson in his second letter, of 20 July (MHS *Collections*, pp. 335, 336), and again with Jefferson in his eighth letter, of 15 August (p. 464). His recollection of his conversation with the Warrens at Braintree in 1788 is in his first letter, of 11 July (p. 327); Mercy Warren gives her account of that exchange in her second letter, of 28 July (pp. 360–62).

16. Mercy Warren's letter of 7 May 1789 and JA's response of 29 May are in *Warren-Adams Letters [:] Being chiefly a correspondence among John Adams, Samuel Adams, and James Warren*, MHS *Collections*, vol. 73 (Boston, 1925), 2:310–14. Criticism of the Warrens' sons appears in letters of AA to JA, and Mary Cranch to AA, in 1776 and 1786; see *AFC*, vols. 2, 3, 7, and 8. On Winslow Warren, see *AFC*, 3:359–60n, and *D&A*, 4:192 (Nov. 1779).

17. The *Warren-Adams Letters* prints the entire correspondence from 1773 to 1814. *PJA*, vols. 2–16, provide the best texts and annotation for all the letters exchanged between JA and both James and Mercy Warren up to 1785; for AA's correspondence with Mercy Warren up to 1787, see *AFC*, vols. 1–8.

18. On the role of JA's polemical correspondence of 1807–12 as an emotional catharsis, see Ellis, *Passionate Sage*, 79–80. On JQA's public career from 1801 to 1809, see Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1949), chaps. 6 and 7. In keeping with his political independence, hatred of political parties, resentments against several Massachusetts Federalists, and ardent nationalism—as well as his keen political ambition for his son—JA explicitly approved, in private letters, JQA's support for the Louisiana Purchase, his vote for Jefferson's Embargo, and even his attendance at the January 1808 congressional caucus of Democratic Republicans that nominated James Madison for the presidency. AA, who was generally more supportive of Federalist positions than her husband, was critical of JQA's presence at the caucus, but JA wrote to JQA that he was "not of your Mother's opinion" (JA to JQA, 25 Feb. 1804, AA to JQA, 15 Feb. 1808, and JA to JQA, 19 Feb. 1808 [quotation], all cited in Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and American Foreign Policy*, 119n23, and 145nn23 and 24).

19. JA's review of Hillhouse's pamphlet, along with the text of the senator's proposed amendments—but not the full text of his pamphlet—appears in JA, *Works*, 6:523–50. Hillhouse published his pamphlet in Washington and New Haven in 1808. JA's review cannot be precisely dated, but he evidently completed it before the balloting for president in December 1808 (see *Works*, 6:546). JA told Jefferson in 1812 that "the Anthologists" to whom he submitted his "Examination" of Hillhouse's pamphlet declined to print it because "I had made pretty free with some of their favourites" (JA to Jefferson, 3 May 1812, *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:303). James Hillhouse (1754–1832) was a High Federalist who served in the House of Representatives from 1791 to 1796, and in the Senate from 1796 to 1810, where he introduced the Alien Enemy Act. He was a close political ally of Senator Timothy Pickering, whom JA had angrily dismissed from his cabinet in 1800. See *ANB*, 10:1813–14; and *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:303.

20. JA, *Works*, 6:527–28. See n. 19, above, for the rejection of JA's essay. The primary personal target of JA's criticism in his review of Hillhouse's amendments was Alexander Hamilton (*Works*, 6:543–44). JA somewhat diminished the Federalists' meager numbers in 1808; in the Tenth Congress there were six Federalists and twenty-eight Democratic Republicans in the Senate (*Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennial Edition* [Cambridge and New York, 2006], 5:200).

21. Note the same colorful image—"Will not both parties cut off at a blow at present, and after some time, perhaps by a proscription or a guillotine, or a banishment to Cayenne or to Botany Bay, every man who dares to vote or speak or write from his conscience and his honor?"—in JA's review of Hillhouse (JA, *Works*, 6:541), and in JA to Benjamin Rush, 20 June 1808 (*Old Family Letters*, 184).

22. JA, *Works*, 6:528–32.

23. JA, *Works*, 6:525–27.

24. JA, *Works*, 6:542–47.

25. Lyman Butterfield, in *D&A*, 1:lxxi–lxxii, characterizes JA's *Boston Patriot* letters as his second autobiography.

26. JA's four letters on King George's proclamation, dated from 9 January to 25 April 1809, ran in the *Patriot* from 19 April to 3 May; they appear in JA, *Works*, 9:312–30. His letter of 26 December 1808 to Congressman J. B. Varnum on America's difficult position between the warring British and French nations, to which his opening 9 January letter in the *Patriot* evidently refers, is in JA, *Works*, 9:604–8. JA first declared his total rejection of Massachusetts Federalism in a letter to JQA of 17 January 1808 (Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and American Foreign Policy*, 144n23).

27. On JA's memorial to the Dutch government dated 19 April 1781 (but actually presented, and immediately published, in early May), see *PJA*, 11:272–84. John Quincy Adams chose to defend President Jefferson's policy toward Britain by critically reviewing the recently published collected works of the late Federalist orator and congressman Fischer Ames. His essays, running in the *Patriot* from April into June 1809, were republished as *American Principles: A Review of the Works of Fisher Ames, Compiled by a Number of His Friends* (Boston, 1809). President Madison nominated JQA as minister to Russia on 6 March, but the Senate rejected the nomination. For the next three months, while both JA's *Inadmissible Principles* and JQA's review of Ames were appearing in the *Patriot*, it was unclear whether JQA would ever be sent to Russia, but on 27 June the increasingly dangerous state of affairs in Europe changed the senators' minds, and he was approved, over the opposition of New England Federalists. See Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and American Foreign Policy*, 151–53 and 153n65.

28. JA affixed the date of 10 April to his first letter on his foreign policy as president, and in his opening line he referred to the *Patriot*'s publication on 7 April of an "extract from the *Baltimore Federal Republican*." But almost immediately he plunged into his defense by quoting in full two letters of 1796, by Joel Barlow and George Washington. This argues for an earlier date of composition for this essay, with its several carefully transcribed documents, than April 1809; Charles Francis Adams, in his introduction to the letters, places their original drafting in 1801 (JA, *Works*, 9:239–40). JA's eighteen letters, which ran from 15 April to 10 June 1809 in the *Patriot*, are in *Works*, 9:241–311.

29. JA's letter xvii appears in *Works*, 9:300–303; the quotation is at p. 302. In the most recent presidential contest (1808), electors were chosen by the state legislatures of Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Massachusetts, New York, South Carolina, and Vermont, and directly by the people in Kentucky, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Virginia (*Historical Statistics*, 5:171). Throughout these letters, JA displayed a sound memory of his own actions as president but a less impressive knowledge of his principal antagonist. At one point he declared that Hamilton could be excused for not understanding American public opinion because he was not only "born and bred in the West Indies" but "went to Scotland for education, where he spent his time in a seminary of learning until seventeen years of age" (*Works*, 9:277)!

30. See *D&A*, 1:lxxi–lxxii.

31. Rush to Jefferson, 2 Jan., 1 Feb., and 17 Dec. 1811 (*Letters of Rush*, 2:1075–76, 1078–79, 1111–12); Rush to JA, 16 Dec. 1811 (*Letters of Rush*, 2:1110–11); JA to Jefferson, 1 Jan. 1812 (*Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:290); Rush to JA, 17 Oct. 1809 (*Letters of Rush*, 2:1021–22, block quotation); and JA to Rush, 25 Oct. 1809 (*Old Family Letters*, 246; also in *Spur of Fame*, 158–59).

32. Printed sources for this correspondence are the *Adams-Jefferson Letters*; *PTJ* (for 1777 to 1801); *PTJ, Retirement Series* (for 1812–17, to date); and *PJA* (to 1787, to date).

33. See *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 1:xxv–xxxii (preface), and xxxiii–li (introduction); and *Letters of Rush*, 1:lxi–lxxiii (introduction).

34. *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 1:vii–xxii (list of letters), and xxxi (summary of correspondence). The only other prominent American who had served with JA in Europe and was still alive in 1812 was John Jay (d. 1829). But while JA respected Jay, he was never personally close to him.

35. Jefferson to JA, 17 July 1791, and JA to Jefferson, 29 July 1791 (*Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 1:246, 248–49).

36. For the full correspondence from 27 May through 25 Dec. 1813, see *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:323–413. Jefferson's 27 June letter to Adams is in 2:335–38; the quotation from Theocritus appears in Greek, with a footnote translation, at p. 335.

37. JA to Jefferson, 15 Sept. 1813 (*Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:376).

38. *ANB*, 21:382–84; *AFC*, 9:377, and 10:37, 39, 54–55, 60–63, 158, 171–72 (on Taylor in the Senate from 1792 to 1794); JA to John Taylor, 9 Apr. 1814, in JA, *Works*, 10:94–96.

39. See JA, *Works*, 6:443 (title page), 445–46 (editorial introduction), and 447–521 (text of the letters). JA's dated manuscript copies in the Adams Papers run from 16 [not 15] April 1814 to 5 March 1815. The first two are not numbered, and numbers 24 through 31 are numbered incorrectly.

40. In various of his letters to Taylor, JA refers to pages 1 through 5, and 10, of the *Inquiry*, and in his thirtieth letter, he admits to having proceeded "not beyond a dozen pages of your work" (JA, *Works*, 6:514). JA focused at length on Taylor's critique of letter

XXV, entitled "Dr. Franklin," in vol. 1 of the *Defence* (see *Works*, 4:392, 397, and 398; and 6:492, 493, and 504).

41. See letters i, iii, xxx, and xxxii (JA, *Works*, 6:448, 452, 514, and 521).

42. See chaps. 7 and 8.

43. See chap. 9, sect. 2.

44. See chap. 9, sect. 2 ("Davila"), and sect. 3, on JA's 1790 correspondence with Samuel Adams.

45. JA to Rush, 5 Feb. and 11 Apr. 1805, and 19 Sept. 1806, *Spur of Fame*, 21, 26–27, and 66; the quotations are from Apr. 1805 (pp. 26–27) and Sept. 1806 (p. 66).

46. See Burton Spivak, *Jefferson's English Crisis: Commerce, Embargo, and the Republican Revolution* (Charlottesville, VA, 1979), chaps. 4 and 5; and sect. 3, above.

47. JA to Rush, 18 Apr. and 25 July 1808, *Spur of Fame*, 108 and 112.

48. JA, *Works*, 6:529–31; and see sect. 3, above.

49. JA to Rush, 23 Mar. and 25 Oct. 1809, and 27 Dec. 1810, *Spur of Fame*, 137–38, 158, 174.

50. JA to Rush, 11 Nov. 1807, *Spur of Fame*, 97–98. This long quotation has been somewhat condensed, without indications of gaps in the quoted material.

51. See chap. 8, sect. 4, above, quoting JA's letter XXIX on James Harrington. The quotation is in JA, *Works*, 4:427 (*Defence*, 1:158).

52. *Spur of Fame*, 281–82 (Rush's death); *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 1:xvi–xxii (list of letters, 1812–26); Jefferson to JA, 27 May, JA to Jefferson, 29 May, Jefferson to JA, 15 June, and JA to Jefferson, 14 June and 10 June 1813, *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:323–25, 325–26, 331–33, 329–30, and 326–27.

53. JA to Jefferson, 25 June, and Jefferson to JA, 27 June 1813, *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:333–35, 335–38; Jefferson wrote "aristoi" in Greek characters (p. 335). I characterize Jefferson's account of his difficult political relationship with JA in the 1790s as "disingenuous" because during JA's administration he had secretly encouraged his political allies, and patronized the journalist James Callender, to attack the president in print. JA's wife Abigail may have had at least an inkling of this clandestine activity early in JA's retirement, and JA critically referred to Callender directly in letters to Jefferson in 1812 and 1813 (*Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 1:243, 266, 273, 274, and 276–77, and 2:295 and 347). How deeply Jefferson believed in the truth of his narrative in 1813 is unclear, but he had made a similar claim of partisan innocence to JA in July and August 1791, during the controversy over his endorsement of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (chap. 9, sect. 4). As for JA, he did not engage in partisan attacks against Jefferson or other Democratic Republicans in the 1790s, but he was hardly without anger or resentment toward his old friend.

54. JA to Jefferson, 14, 25, 28, and 30 June, and Jefferson to JA, 15 June 1813, *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:329–30, 333–35 (quotation at p. 334), 338–40, 346–48, and 331–33 (quotation at p. 331). The text of President Adams's reply to the May 1798 "Address of the Young Men of the City of Philadelphia," from which JA quotes in his letter of 28 June 1813 (*Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:339), is printed in JA, *Works*, 9:187–89.

55. JA to Jefferson, 9 July 1813, *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:350–52; quotations at p. 352. JA also wrote "aristoi" in Greek characters.

56. JA to Jefferson, 13 and 15 July 1813, *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:354–58; but see chap. 8, on JA's motivations for writing his *Defence of the Constitutions*.

57. JA to Jefferson, [14?] Aug. 1813, *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:365–66.

58. JA to Jefferson, 2 Sept. 1813, *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:370–71, quotations at p. 371; and see JA to Jefferson, 15 Sept. 1813, 2:375–77.

59. Jefferson to JA, 28 Oct. 1813, *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:387–92, quotations at p. 388. One could write a whole chapter on the feast of ideas in this splendid letter, and another on JA's reply of 15 November. On at least two points Jefferson did not fully understand JA. Although JA presumably did expect that senates would defend the interests of the aristocracy against the people, as his concern over the challenge by Shays's Rebellion to his own Massachusetts Senate suggests, his main concern in all his writings was to protect both the people and the executive from the aristocracy. Regarding Jefferson's view of aristocracy in New England and Virginia, JA clearly thought Virginia the more aristocratic culture (see JA to Benjamin Rush, 11 Nov. 1807, quoted above), and at the same time was never upset with New England's old leading families, but only with some of its new men of wealth.

60. JA to Jefferson, 15 Nov. 1813, *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:397–402, quotations at pp. 397, 398. In the last quotation, the author has added commas after "Birth" and "Craft" for clarity.

61. *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:398–400.

62. *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:400–401.

63. *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:400. On 19 Dec. 1813, JA wrote another letter to Jefferson commenting on yet more examples of aristocracy (*Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:406–9), but thereafter the topic essentially disappears from their correspondence.

64. JA, *Works*, 6:447, 448–49 (letter I, 16 Apr. 1814; the manuscript datelines of JA's letters to Taylor, omitted in *Works*, are supplied in the notes here).

65. JA, *Works*, 6:450, 451, 456 (letters II and IV, 16 and 19 Apr. 1814).

66. JA, *Works*, 6:452 (letter III, 19 Apr. 1814). JA may have visited the Hôpital des Enfans-Trouves with AA in January 1785; see AA to Elizabeth Smith Shaw, 11 Jan. 1785, *AFC*, 6:56–58, 59n.

67. JA, *Works*, 6:453–54 (letter III), and 456 (letters IV, and V, [? Apr.]–4 June 1814).

68. JA, *Works*, 6:457–58 (letter V).

69. JA, *Works*, 6:458, 459–60 (letter VI, 7 June 1814), and 460–62 (letter VII, 9 June 1814). Taylor had married the daughter and only child of John Penn, a North Carolina congressman whom JA had known in 1776, when he composed his *Thoughts on Government* (see chap. 5, sect. 2).

70. JA, *Works*, 6:462, 463–64 (letter VIII, 17 June 1814).

71. JA, *Works*, 6:463–68 (letters VIII, IX, and X; 17 and 18 June, and 29 July 1814).

72. JA, *Works*, 6:476–78 (letter XV, 12 Dec. 1814), compares the duration of abuse under democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy.

73. JA, *Works*, 6:473–74, 478, 480 (letters XIII, 21 Nov. 1814, and XVI, 14 Dec. 1814); quotations at pp. 473 and 480.

74. JA, *Works*, 6:491–96 (letters XXI and XXII, 23 and 27 Dec. 1814); quotation at p. 491.

75. JA, *Works*, 6:496–504 (letters XXIII–XXV, 7, 9, and 12 Jan. 1815).

76. JA, *Works*, 6:498–504 (letters XXIII–XXV, and letter XXVI, 13 Jan. 1815); quotations at pp. 504, 503, and 504. In a comic twentieth-century echo of the filiopietism of American aristocracy, Lisa Birnbach, in *The Official Preppy Handbook* (New York, 1980), 22, observes that the preppy home should have portraits of ancestors, but not portraits of presidents "(unless they are ancestors)."

77. JA, *Works*, 6:504–5 (letter XXVI), 507–8 (letter XXVII, 16 Jan. 1815).

78. JA, *Works*. 6:507–8 (letter XXVII), and 509–10 (letter XXVIII. 18 Jan. 1815).

79. JA, *Works*, 6:514–18 (letters XXX and XXXI, 21 and 24 Jan. 1815).

80. JA, *Works*, 6:518–21 (letter XXXII, 5 Mar. 1815); quotations at p. 519.

81. JA, *Works*, 6:519, 521.

82. Brief accounts of JA's involvement in Massachusetts' constitutional convention of 1820–21 appear in Page Smith, *John Adams* (New York, 1962), 2:1129–30; David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York, 2001), 631; Grant, *John Adams: Party of One*, 446; and Charles Francis Adams's life of JA, in *Works*, 1:624–28. The account here rests largely on the *Journal of Debates and Proceedings in the Convention of Delegates, Chosen to Revise the Constitution of Massachusetts, Begun and held at Boston, November 15, 1820, and continued by Adjournment to January 9, 1821* (Boston, 1821); *The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Boston, 1981); and the discussion of JA's original 1779 *Report of a Constitution for Massachusetts* in chap. 6.

83. Smith, *John Adams*, 1129; *Journal of Debates and Proceedings*, 8–11, 17, 51, 86, 99, 103–4, 108–9, 110, 134–35, 152, 193, 209, and 212. On the duration of JA's unspecified indisposition from December into February, see McCullough, *John Adams*, 631.

84. *Journal of Debates and Proceedings*, 103–4, 108–9, 134–35.

85. *Journal of Debates and Proceedings*, 209, 212; see chap. 6, sect.4, on JA's decision not to draft Article III of the Declaration of Rights. I characterize that article as endorsing the Protestant Christian religion because, although the closing sentence that JA sought to revise simply reads "every denomination of christians," a previous section of that article limited state support to "public protestant teachers of piety, religion, and morality" (*Constitution of the Commonwealth*, 5, 4).

86. See *Constitution of the Commonwealth*, 42, 43, 35–36, and 39–40 (Amendments XIII [1840] and XVI [1855], on the Council; III [1821], on the franchise; and XI [1833], on the establishment of religion).

87. On JA's disapproval of the growing zealotry of preachers in Boston, and elsewhere in America, see JA to Jefferson, 25 June 1813, and 18 May 1817, *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:334, 515.

88. JA's religious beliefs have not concerned this study because all his writings, public and private, argue that his view of republican thought was entirely secular; rewards and punishments for political behavior were meted out in this world, not in the next. But from about 1805, when he began corresponding with the deeply religious Dr. Rush, and continuing when the more secular Jefferson took Rush's place as his leading correspondent in 1813, JA often read religious works, particularly of a Continental Protestant or English Unitarian vintage, and wrote about the ideas he found there. A lifelong churchgoer, JA believed strongly, both as a young and as an old man, in a caring, paternal God, was hopeful of a benign afterlife as a reward for virtuous behavior (without specifying whatever might await the unvirtuous), and had the highest respect for the ethical teachings of Jesus, while rejecting both his divinity and his capacity to save souls (see C. Bradley Thompson's *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty* [Lawrence, KS, 1998], chap. 1; *Spur of Fame*; *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, vol. 2; and JA to Samuel Miller, 8 July 1820, in JA, *Works*, 10:389–90).

89. JA to Rush, 27 Dec. 1810, *Spur of Fame*, 174. This passage immediately follows the block quotation that appears above in this chapter, at n. 49.

Conclusion. Memory and Desire in America's Republican Revolution

Epigraph: To the extent than one can ever fruitfully speculate about the likely reaction of an earlier historical character to a later one, JA would probably not have found T. S. Eliot congenial either as a thinker or as a man. But he could readily appreciate the idea

of political and cultural regeneration, which lay at the core of the republican revival of the late eighteenth century. And unlike Eliot, he embraced the regeneration that faced him, in his own idiosyncratic manner, without fear.

1. For a brief introduction to early modern revolutions before 1776, see Robert Forster and Jack P. Greene, eds., *Preconditions of Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore, 1970). Revolutions that created republics, and counterrevolutions that destroyed them, were a constant feature of political life in Greece from the seventh to the fourth centuries BCE, and were nearly as common in northern Italy from the thirteenth through the sixteenth century, as JA would discover as he researched and wrote his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*. Since 1776, of course, both revolutionary change and counterrevolutionary resistance, often bearing a false flag of revolution, have again become frequent on an ever-larger scale, on nearly every continent.

2. See chap. 1, sect. 1. Alone among the thirteen rebelling British American colonies, Massachusetts had an *eastern* frontier, in its district of Maine. But Maine's small, slowly growing communities never developed social and political frontier characteristics on the scale of the western frontiers that shaped the economies and politics of New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia well into the nineteenth century.

3. See chap. 1, sect. 1. For JA's belief in extraterrestrial intelligent life, see *D&A*, 1:22 (25–26 Apr. 1756).

4. See chap. 1, sects. 2 and 3.

5. See chap. 1, sect. 3; chap. 2, sect. 4; and Daniel R. Coquillette, "Justinian in Braintree: John Adams, Civilian Learning, and Legal Elitism, 1758–1775," in Coquillette, ed., *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, vol. 62, *Law in Colonial Massachusetts, 1630–1800* (Boston, 1984), 359–418.

6. See chap. 1, sects. 4–6; chap. 2, sect. 6; chap. 3, sects. 1–2; and chap. 4, sects. 2–3.

7. See chap. 2, sect. 4; and chap. 3, sect. 1.

8. See chap. 3, sect. 2.

9. See chap. 4, sects. 2–3; and chap. 5, sect. 2.

10. See chap. 5, sects. 2–3; and chap. 6, sects. 4–5.

11. See chaps. 8–10.

12. See JA's "Clarendon Letters" (chap. 1, sect. 5), his *Thoughts on Government* (chap. 5, sect. 2), and his draft of the Massachusetts constitution (chap. 6, sect. 4).

13. See chaps. 5, 6, and 9.

14. See chaps. 7 and 8. On JA's view of the One, the Few, and the Many, see chap. 8, sect. 4; and C. Bradley Thompson's *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty* (Lawrence, KS, 1998), 177.

15. See chaps. 8 and 9.

16. See chaps. 9 and 10. A major exception to the common assent to Howe's and Wood's argument about JA's changing political views is Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, xviii, 245–46.

17. For Abigail's prediction of 20 March 1787, see the first head quote to chap. 9; on the initial identification of JA with "republican monarchy," see chap. 9, sects. 1, 2, and 4.

18. See chap. 9, sect. 5 (on JA's Inaugural Address), and chap. 10.

19. See chaps. 1–3.

20. See chaps. 3–5.

21. See chaps. 6 and 7.

22. See chap. 8.

23. See chap. 9, sect. 2, and chap. 10, sects. 4–6.

24. Jefferson to Short, 8 Jan. 1825, in Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, eds., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, DC, 1903), 16:93; Gordon S. Wood, "Monarchism and Republicanism in Early America," in Wood, *The Idea of America: Reflections on the Birth of the United States* (New York, 2011), 231–49, 364–65; Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century," in Wood, *The Idea of America*, 81–123, 347–56 (originally published in the *William and Mary Quarterly* in 1982); and see chap. 8, sect. 4 (JA's *Defence*), and chap. 9, sect. 1, above.

25. See Wood, "Monarchy and Republicanism in Early America"; Jack Warren, "In the Shadow of Washington: John Adams as Vice President," in Richard Alan Ryerson, ed., *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic* (Boston, 2001), 117–41; and chap. 9, sect. 1.

26. See Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992), chap. 6, "The Republicanization of Monarchy."

27. See chap. 2, sect. 6, above, on the oration at Braintree.

28. *Thoughts on Government*, in *PJA*, 4:87 (quotation); see chap. 5, sect. 2.

29. *D&A*, 2:57–58.

30. See chap. 9, sects. 1 and 5.

31. See chap. 9, sect. 1, on JA as "the Duke of Braintree" and "His Rotundity" during the executive titles controversy; and Gouverneur Morris to John? Penn, 20 May 1774, in Jared Sparks, *Life of Gouverneur Morris* (Boston, 1832), 1:25.

32. Abraham Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address" (19 Nov. 1863), in David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, eds., *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War: A Political, Social, and Military History* (Santa Barbara, CA, 2000), 5:2359–60; Madison to Jefferson, 12 May 1791, *James Madison: Writings*, ed. Jack N. Rakove (New York, 1999), 491.

33. *James Madison: Writings*, 161 (*Federalist* No. 10). See the introduction, sects. 2 and 3; and Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1969), esp. chap. 14.

34. A telling example occurs in Thompson's *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty*. In his conclusion Thompson, perhaps his generation's most ardent admirer of JA, sensibly characterizes his hero as standing somewhat apart from America's democratic tradition, admiring certain features of democracy while viewing it whole with a critical eye. But in discussing JA's draft constitution for Massachusetts, he claims that its franchise was "as liberal as any in America at the time." Massachusetts's franchise was hardly aristocratic, but JA's *Report of a Constitution* increased the property qualification for electing representatives contained in the provincial charter to the highest level found in any American state constitution, and JA publicly defended that qualification as late as 1820. Moreover, Massachusetts set high property qualifications for holding public office, particularly for its governor, an office that JA was determined to defend in every way possible from an overbearing aristocracy of wealth, which he foresaw populating his Senate.

At a more theoretical level, tucked away in a significant footnote, Thompson disputes Gordon Wood's judgment, in *The Creation of the American Republic*: "For Adams the people may have been the source of all authority, yet the people themselves still only participated directly as a constituent element of the society in one part of the government." This assertion, Thompson claims, is based "almost entirely on one word, in one sentence of one Adams letter." In that letter of 1790, however, JA flatly declared to his cousin Samuel that in a republic, the people had "collectively, or by representation, an essential share in the sovereignty." To Samuel Adams's response that the entire sovereignty rested in the people, JA never replied. Thompson sees his silence as an admission

of error. But JA's statement to his cousin in 1790 is utterly consistent with his earlier and later statements that while the people, in the broadest sense, possessed the fundamental, Lockean constituent power in any republic, the people in his more usual meaning, as the Many (but not the whole), were but one part—exactly one-third—of a republic's operational sovereignty. See Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 277–78, 238, 317n15; Willi Paul Adams, *The First American Constitutions: Republican Ideology and the Making of the State Constitutions in the Revolutionary Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1980), 200–203, 295; Wood, *Creation of the Republic*, 585; and chap. 6, sect. 4. And see *Spirit of Liberty*, 317n16, where Thompson approvingly quotes John Paynter's summary of JA's position: "The people must constitute government; they need not actually *run* government" ("John Adams: On the Principles of a Political Science," *Political Science Reviewer* 6 [1976]: 42). This neatly expresses what JA really believed.

35. See chap. 2, sect. 6.

36. See chap. 1, sects. 1 and 2. After JA's death, John Quincy Adams developed a new coat of arms for the Adams family.

37. See chaps. 1–4, 9, and 10.

38. See chap. 1, sect. 3, and Coquillette, "Justinian in Braintree."

39. See chaps. 2–4.

40. See chaps. 4 and 5.

41. See chaps. 6–10.

42. JA's celebrated letter to AA of post 12 May 1780 (*AFC*, 3:342), presents his aspirations for the political and cultural evolution of his family across three generations, but it is just as appropriate as a vision for his young nation.

43. For an effective evocation of this lost world, see Barbara Clark Smith, *Freedoms We Lost: Consent and Resistance in Revolutionary America* (New York, 2010).

44. For the author's earlier thoughts on these questions, see the "Essay on Sources."

45. The new republican thought that JA missed while in Europe is the essential subject of Gordon Wood's *Creation of the Republic*.

46. The colleague, in a professional, not an institutional sense, is Professor Alan Tully of the University of Texas at Austin, who was a fellow member of Jack Greene's seminar in early American history at Johns Hopkins University in the late 1960s. As chair of the Texas history department, Professor Tully afforded the author an opportunity to present the first chapter of this work in Austin, Texas, in 2010, at which time he posed the question stated in this paragraph.

47. Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, chap. 12, identifies critics of JA's *Defence* who condemned the work on the basis of its use of "monarchy" and "aristocracy," without having read it; chap. 10, sect. 6, discusses JA's remarks to Taylor on aristocracy.

48. I take "Party of One" from the title of Grant's recent biography of JA (*John Adams: Party of One*). On R. R. Livingston as an early Democratic Republican, see chap. 9, sect. 4. For JA's subtle jabs at John Taylor of Caroline as a slaveholding aristocrat, see chap. 10, sect. 6; Jefferson's defense of "natural aristocracy" is discussed in the same section.

49. See chap. 7; chap. 9, sects. 2 and 4; and chap. 10, sects. 3 and 4–6.

50. JA's *Defence of the Constitutions* (1787–88) and his "Discourses on Davila" (1790–91) were published as soon as he wrote them, and his important brief exchange of letters with Samuel Adams of 1790 appeared in pamphlet form in 1804, a year before the republication of his *Discourses on Davila* in book form. But several of JA's other important writings on government, especially on aristocracy, including his exchange of letters with Roger Sherman (1789), many of his letters to Dr. Benjamin Rush (1805–13), his re-

view of Senator Hillhouse's proposed amendments (1808), his letters to John Taylor of Caroline (1814–15), and many substantial letters to Thomas Jefferson (1812–26), all had to wait for their inclusion in Charles Francis Adams's *Works of John Adams* (1851–56). Many other important JA letters to Rush and Jefferson did not first appear until the twentieth century, and more to Jefferson are still appearing in the ongoing *PTJ, Retirement Series*.

51. For a comprehensive discussion of the dynamics of wealth concentration in America and in the major European nations known to JA across some two centuries, see Thomas Picketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA, 2014).

52. "Clarendon to Pym," 26 Jan. 1766, *PJA*, 1:169; see chap. 1, sect. 5.

53. In characterizing JA's ideal republic in this way, the author is not claiming that JA was envisioning the modern welfare state, any more than he envisioned the modern industrial state. In his native New England, poor relief was the responsibility of each town, as JA well knew from his service as a Braintree selectman and overseer of the poor in the 1760s, and he had no thought of making this a national obligation (see Bernard Bailyn, "Butterfield's Adams: Notes for a Sketch," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 19 [1962]: 239–56). What he did believe, however, was that government at every level had an obligation to protect the humbler members of society, including those in its broad middle class, from oppression by the wealthy. In this sense, JA was one of the most community-oriented of the Founding Fathers. For an appreciation of this vital point, see Joseph J. Ellis, *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams* (New York, 1993), 229, 164, which Thompson, *Spirit of Liberty*, 314n46, finds excessive.

54. *Report of a Constitution*, chap. VI, sect. 2, in *PJA*, 8:260.

55. JA to Tristram Dalton, 5 Mar. 1785, *PJA*, 16:542. I previously quoted this passage at the end of my introduction to Ryerson, *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic*, 30.

56. JA to Rush, 28 Aug. 1811, in *The Spur of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush, 1805–1813*, ed. John A. Schutz and Douglass Adair (San Marino, CA, 1966), 207.

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AN ESSAY ON SOURCES

For all who would understand the development of John Adams's thought, character, and personality, their subject has left a rich legacy of unpublished source material, often of the most revealing nature, in addition to his extensive published writings. In America's founding generation only Washington and Jefferson wrote more letters, but of a far less intimate character, than the thousands written by Adams to his wife and his closest friends, as well as to a host of legal and political colleagues, and only Adams wrote an extensive and intimate diary.

For the purposes of this study, virtually all of John Adams's writings have been of value, with important if often fragmentary testimony cropping up virtually anywhere. The major sources employed here are:

1. Adams's many small diary books—an immediate and intimate record of his reading and thinking that was never intended for any other eyes than his—which are quite full for the period 1756–76, and fairly extensive, if more sporadic, from 1777 to 1783, before trailing off into silence in the 1790s
2. His manuscript autobiography, written between 1802 and 1807 and probably intended only for his family, which covers his youth, education, and public life to 1780, before abruptly ending
3. His notes from his legal reading, and those he took for legal cases in which he was counsel, extending from 1758 to 1778, which are often highly illuminating, especially for the Boston Massacre trials in 1770
4. His rich correspondence with his wife Abigail, intimate in character but regularly engaging the largest public issues of the day (by both correspondents), and covering in great detail his courtship in the early 1760s, his service in Congress from 1774 to 1777, his life in Europe from 1778 to 1784, and extensive periods of his vice presidency (1789–97) and, even more fully, his presidency (1797–1801)
5. His personal letters, largely unintended for publication, to several major and minor figures of America's Revolutionary era, most notably Benjamin Rush and Thomas Jefferson, and extending in full volume from 1775 into the 1820s
6. His more public letters addressed to legislators, executives, and diplomats in America, France, Holland, and Britain, which were often intended for, and soon saw, publication
7. Many unpublished essays, notes for essays and orations, and a few drafts of undated letters, usually quite brief and often fragmentary, from the 1750s to the 1780s, and during his retirement

8. His published works, usually first appearing as essays in newspapers or as pamphlets, and only occasionally as full volumes, in America, Britain, Holland, and France, and in English, French, and Dutch, from 1763 until 1812
9. His personal library of some three thousand titles, acquired from the 1740s to the 1820s, with scores of volumes signed and dated, and many containing extensive marginal notations in his hand

Amid this substantial body of evidence, the eighth category, John Adams's published political writing, is of the first importance for this study, but every expression of his literary legacy has been essential to my understanding of Adams as a thinker and writer. The body of the present work quotes liberally from and cites these many sources as the argument proceeds. Suffice it to say here that virtually all the original manuscripts in categories 1–4 and 7—Adams's diary and autobiography, legal notes, family letters, and unpublished essays—are at the Massachusetts Historical Society, as is much of the material in categories 5 and 6—his nonfamily correspondence, both personal and public—with the remainder found in other public archives all over America and Europe. John Adams's personal library is in the Rare Book Room of the Boston Public Library, where any reader may consult its volumes; an extensive catalog of that collection is now fully digitized and online.

The Adams Papers editorial project at the Massachusetts Historical Society, whose volumes are issued by Harvard University Press, and which are also being digitized for broader usage, has now published, in several series, John Adams's diary and autobiography, his legal material, and virtually all of his unpublished essays (categories 1–3, and 7), as well as nearly every family letter (category 4) up to 1798, and a comprehensive selection of his nonfamily correspondence and all his published works (categories 5, 6, and 8) up to 1787. I have used the Adams Papers volumes for both citations and quotations, in decided preference to earlier editions, wherever possible. My preferred sources for Adams's correspondence and other manuscript material that the Adams Papers project has not yet published include the Massachusetts Historical Society's Adams Papers microfilm edition of the original manuscripts and selected published editions of the papers of Adams's major correspondents. As for Adams's published works after 1786, I have used early editions or facsimile reprints of such editions wherever possible and have consulted and on occasion quoted from later editions as needed, especially from Charles Francis Adams's ten-volume edition of *The Works of John Adams* (Boston, 1851–56).

Utilizing these rich resources, several scholars have offered assessments, in greater or lesser scope and detail, of John Adams's political thought. His major scholarly and popular biographers, including Gilbert Chinard, *Honest John Adams* (Boston, 1933), Katherine Drinker Bowen, *John Adams and the American Revolution* (Boston, 1949), Page Smith, *John Adams* (New York, 1962), John Ferling,

John Adams: A Life (Knoxville, TN, 1992), David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York, 2001), and James Grant, *John Adams: Party of One* (New York, 2005), faced with recounting in one volume (or Page Smith's two) an unusually long life highlighted by prominent careers in provincial law, early congressional service, and pioneering diplomacy, capped by a term as America's second president, and concluding with the longest presidential retirement before the twentieth century, have understandably made relatively modest contributions to exploring the political thought of a figure whom they saw primarily as a man of action.

Over the past century, however, nearly a dozen scholars have grappled with Adams's thought, and with his personality and character, in extensive topical studies. The first and last of these, by Correa M. Walsh, *The Political Science of John Adams: A Study in the Theory of Mixed Government and the Bicameral System* (New York, 1915), and C. Bradley Thompson, *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty* (Lawrence, KS, 1998), and another in between by Edward Handler, *America and Europe in the Political Thought of John Adams* (Cambridge, MA, 1964), have essentially been works of political science that have focused on Adams's longer political writings, with relatively little attention to their context in his political career and private life. To these one should add a brief but insightful chapter in a larger work by Ralph Lerner, *The Thinking Revolutionary: Principle and Practice in the New Republic* (Ithaca, NY, 1987). An exotic variant to both a political science and a literary criticism approach is Zoltan Haraszti's *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress* (Cambridge, MA, 1952), a dissection of Adams's extensive marginalia in several volumes by other authors in his personal library. Three other scholars, Peter Shaw, *The Character of John Adams* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1976), James Hutson, *John Adams and the Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (Lexington, KY, 1980), and Joseph J. Ellis, *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams* (New York, 1993), have brought Adams's distinctive personality to bear on both his public career and his political writings. Two more, John R. Howe, in *The Changing Political Thought of John Adams* (Princeton, 1966), and Gordon S. Wood in a celebrated chapter in *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1969), have made the most direct attempts to connect Adams's political ideas to his career and to the political thought of his era. Later chapters in the present study, in the text and notes, make occasional comments on several of these works.

Those who wish to trace the evolution of the author's approach to John Adams's political ideas prior to the present volume should read: "'Like a Hare before the Hunters': John Adams and the Idea of Republican Monarchy," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 107 (1995): 16–29; "John Adams, Republican Monarchist: An Inquiry into the Origins of His Constitutional Thought," in Eliga H. Gould and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution and the Atlantic World* (Baltimore, 2005), 71–92, 330–32 (originally a 2000 conference paper given in Baltimore in honor of Jack P.

Greene); "John Adams in Europe: A Provincial Cosmopolitan Confronts the Metropolitan World, 1778–1788," in Leonard J. Sadosky et al., eds., *Old World, New World: America and Europe in the Age of Jefferson* (Charlottesville, VA, 2010), 131–54 (originally a 2005 conference paper given in Salzburg, Austria); and "A John Adams Paradox: Provincial Lawyer, Cosmopolitan Reader, Ardent Nationalist," in Robert C. Baron and Conrad Edick Wright, eds., *The Libraries, Leadership, & Legacy of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson* (Golden, CO, 2010), 179–205, 286–89 (originally a 2009 conference paper given in Boston).

A CHRONOLOGY OF JOHN ADAMS'S POLITICAL STUDY AND WRITINGS

All essays and public letters were first published in newspapers in the year given below, unless otherwise noted. First publication of major private correspondences is also noted.

1735
30 October: Born in Braintree, Mass.

1751–55
Attends and graduates from Harvard College

1753–96
Keeps a diary irregularly; fullest entries in 1770s

1756–58
Reads law in Worcester, Mass.
Reads Bolingbroke's political and historical essays

1758
Receives Harvard M.A.; thesis argues for necessity of civil government
Returns to Braintree; begins reading Justinian's *Institutes*

1758–1774
Practices law in Braintree and Boston; rides circuit to most Mass. county courthouses

1760–62
Early unpublished writings

1761
Death of father; inherits a house and land

1763
First published essays, signed "Humphrey Ploughjogger" and "U"; and unpublished "Tyrants" essay

1764
Marries Abigail Smith (AA), of Weymouth, Mass.

1765
Daughter Abigail (AA2) born; later Mrs. William Stephens Smith
Writes *A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* (four untitled newspaper essays; later published as a titled pamphlet in London)
Drafts Braintree's Stamp Act Instructions; writes last "Humphrey Ploughjogger" essay

1766
Writes "Clarendon" essays

1767
Writes "Governor Winthrop" essays
Son John Quincy (JQA) born

Late 1760s
Begins reading Algernon Sidney's *Discourses on Government*

1770
Defends British soldiers charged with Boston Massacre

1771
Takes a vacation journey to Connecticut

Early 1770s
Reads John Locke's *Two Treatises on Government*

1772
Gives oration on government at Braintree (notes survive)

1773
Writes essays on the independence of Mass. judges

Drafts core of House of Representatives' replies to Gov. Hutchinson

1774
Drafts argument for House of Representatives' impeachment of Chief Justice Peter Oliver
Elected a delegate to First Continental Congress
Contributes to Congress's Declaration of Rights and Grievances

1774–75
Begins study of Harrington, and perhaps Machiavelli

1775
Jan.–April: Writes *Letters of Novanglus* essays
April: Battles of Lexington and Concord
May–Dec.: Serves in Second Continental Congress
November: Writes letter on government to R. H. Lee

1776
January: Drafts Mass. legislature's proclamation to the people
Feb.–Oct.: Serves in Congress
March–April: Writes *Thoughts on Government*
May: Drafts Preamble to Congress's Resolve urging independent provincial governments
June: Named president of Congress's Board of War
July: Gives final argument for Independence in Congress
June–Sept.: Writes Plan of Treaties for Congress

1777
Jan.–Nov.: Serves in Congress
November: Appointed to three-man commission in Paris

1778
February: Sails for Europe with JQA
April: Begins service in Paris

1779
February: Three-man commission dissolved; Franklin becomes minister to France
August: Returns to Mass.; elected to constitutional convention
Sept.–Oct.: Drafts text of Massachusetts Constitution of 1780
September: Appointed sole peace commissioner
November: Sails for Europe with sons JQA and Charles

1780
Feb.–July: In Paris; dispute with the French foreign ministry
July: Travels to Holland; remains as envoy until 1782

1781
April: Asks Netherlands' States General to recognize American Independence
June: Congress names JA head of five-man peace commission
Aug.–Sept.: Experiences major illness in Amsterdam

1782
April: Netherlands recognizes American Independence
July: Negotiates first Dutch loan to Congress
October: Negotiates Dutch-American Treaty of Amity and Commerce
November: With Franklin and Jay, negotiates preliminary peace treaty with Britain

1783
September: Signs Peace of Paris with Britain, ending War of Independence
Sept.–Oct.: Experiences major illness in Paris
Fall–winter: Visits England with JQA

1784
July–August: Reunites with AA and AA2; settles in Auteuil, near Paris

1784–85
With Franklin and Jefferson, negotiates treaties of commerce
Studies Plato in Auteuil

1785
May: Travels to London as America's first minister to Britain

1786
Aug.–Sept.: Travels to Holland with AA; witnesses triumph of Patriot Party
October: Begins *A Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*

1787
January: Completes and publishes vol. 1 of *A Defence*
March: Begins vol. 2 of *A Defence*
August: Completes and publishes vol. 2 of *A Defence*
Nov.–Dec.: Comments on U.S. Constitution
December: Completes vol. 3 of *A Defence* (published in early 1788)

1788
June: Returns to America
U.S. Constitution ratified

1789
April: Elected vice-president; takes oath in Senate
April–May: Involved in executive titles controversy in Congress
July: Correspondence with Roger Sherman on executive power (published in 1850s)

1790
April: Begins "Discourses on Davila" in *National Gazette*
Fall: Correspondence with Samuel Adams on government (published in 1802)

1791
April: Terminates "Discourses on Davila" essays
May–Aug.: Controversy with Jefferson and Democratic Republicans over "Davila"

1793
February: Re-elected vice-president

1794
May: JQA appointed minster to the Netherlands

1796
September: Washington's Farewell Address
December: Elected Second President of the United States

1797
March: Gives Inaugural Address
June: Appoints JQA minister to Prussia
Quasi-war with France begins

1798
June–July: Signs the Alien and Sedition Acts

1799
February: Sends peace negotiators to France

1800
May: Dismisses Secretary of State Pickering and Secretary of War McHenry
Aug.–Sept.: Hamilton publicly attacks JA
Sept.–Oct.: Convention of Mortefontaine concluded with France
November: Defeated for re-election by Jefferson and Burr

1801
March: Jefferson becomes Third President of the United States

1802
October: Begins his autobiography in Quincy (published in 1850s)

1803
JQA elected to U. S. Senate

1805
February: Resumes correspondence with Benjamin Rush (published from 1850s to 1960s)
Publishes collected edition of *Discourses on Davila*

1807
July: Criticizes Mercy Warren's portrait of him in her *History* (letters published in 1878)
December: JQA votes for Jefferson's Embargo; JA approves

1808
May: Mass. legislature terminates JQA's Senate career
Writes critique of Sen. Hillhouse's amendments (published in 1850s)

1809
Breaks with Mass. Federalists
April: Begins publishing his letters to the *Boston Patriot*
June: JQA appointed minister to Russia

1812
January: Resumes correspondence with Jefferson (published from 1850s to 1960s)
Collected letters to the *Boston Patriot* published
June: War of 1812 begins

1813
April: Benjamin Rush dies
May–Dec.: Correspondence with Jefferson on aristocracy
August: Daughter Abigail (AA2; Mrs. William Stephens Smith) dies in Quincy

1814
April: Begins his letters to John Taylor of Caroline (published in 1850s)
August: British invade Washington, D.C., and burn Library of Congress
December: JQA and others conclude peace with Britain in Ghent, Belgium

1815
March: Correspondence with John Taylor ends

1817
JQA appointed secretary of state, returns to America

1818
October: Wife Abigail (AA) dies in Quincy

1819
Publication of letters of *Novanglus* and Massachusettensis

1820
Nov.–Dec.: Attends sessions of Mass. constitutional convention

1822
Gives his library to Town of Quincy (later transferred to Boston Public Library); papers retained by family until 20th century

1825
February: JQA elected Sixth President of the United States

1826
4 July: Dies in Quincy; Jefferson dies at Monticello

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